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A Presidential Leadership Process For Higher Education In Small, Rural Institutions And Settings

Teresa Caplinger Spaeth

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A PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP PROCESS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN SMALL,
RURAL INSTITUTIONS AND SETTINGS

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements
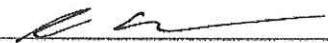

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May
2019

This dissertation, submitted by Teresa Ann Spaeth in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Dr. Joshua Cohen, Chair

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Dr. Donna Pearson

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

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Dr. Chris Nelson
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

4/29/19
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Date

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PERMISSION

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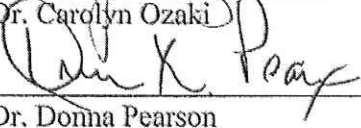
Department   Educational Leadership

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Teresa Ann Spaeth
May 1, 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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- My children, Greg and McKenna, who sacrificed the most during this journey. Their patience and respect for education was immense, and I never would have made it without their love and support.

This paper is dedicated to my father, Tom Caplinger.

ABSTRACT

A qualitative research study was conducted to explore leadership competencies of presidents of public universities with enrollments of less than 7,000, located in small rural communities and distant locations in the Upper Midwest. The context of higher education is constantly evolving. Internal pressures from faculty and students, as well as external factors such as finances, new technologies, and stakeholder demands play a role in determining the future of academic institutions and the success of their leadership.

Much literature has been written regarding higher education leadership, best practices for success, and future changes that should be made to maintain sustainable institutions, especially in rural settings. However, little research has been conducted focusing on higher education institutions set in rural locations that serve primarily rural stakeholders. This study added to the knowledge on rural educational institutions by: (a) using in-depth interviews to explore the context of leadership at rural higher education institutions, (b) analyzing skill sets identified by the presidents interviewed, and (c) attempting to identify suggested competencies that may help future leaders, or those selecting future leaders, to better prepare for conditions that lie ahead.

During the course of this research, it became apparent that effective leadership depends upon a process, and that process was used to develop a grounded theory model described in detail within this dissertation. The resulting model highlights the complexity and breadth of consideration participating presidents have taken in the process of leading their

institutions. This process depicts how presidents must develop strategic foresight that

includes a consideration of the culture and context of their institutions as well as the needs of

a vast array of stakeholders in order to advance their institutions and create sustainability in

their institutions for the future. After developing foresight, leaders assess strengths and

weaknesses of each opportunity that presents itself. Then leaders work on empowering

faculty and staff at their institutions to move forward.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The basic reality, for the university, is the widespread recognition that new knowledge is the most important factor in economic and social growth. We are just now perceiving that the university's invisible product, knowledge, may be the most powerful single element in our culture, affecting the rise and fall of professions and even of social classes, of regions and even of nations.
                                                              – Clark Kerr (2001, p. xii)

The importance of higher education to the prosperity of a nation has long been recognized. According to Kerr (2001), education, research, community service, and academe advances both the economic and social welfare of a country. Education is integral to a nation's ability to achieve and sustain economic prosperity and social equity. This prominence keeps higher education at the forefront of national, regional, and local forces interested in performance and innovation (Fullan & Scott, 2009; Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013). The complexity of concerns that universities and their leaders now face are unlike those of the past and may call for a different type of leadership (Bok, 2013; Kezar, 2018; Skinner, 2010). The American system of higher education has been under pressure to continually transform to meet ever-increasing expectations of stakeholders. With no coordinated higher education system for the nation, each institution and its governing board frequently find themselves addressing pressures individually to remain relevant and viable into the future (Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Kezar, 2018).

Historically, the responsibility for an educational institution's overall relevancy, strategic planning, and future viability fell to the university's president working with the institution's governing board (Fisher & Koch, 1996; Hendrickson et al., 2013; MacTaggart, 2017). This included creating a vision as well as identifying and implementing strategies that moved university constituencies to achieve their vision (Fisher & Koch, 1996; Hendrickson et al., 2013). As leadership was (and is) responsible for the allocation of resources and establishment of institutional priorities, it was imperative that a university president was integrally involved in the design and support of the planning and implementation process (Bornstein, 2003; Hendrickson et al., 2013).

University leadership need not understand context only but also the complexities of an institution (Buller, 2014; MacTaggart, 2017; Rupp et al., 2016). University leadership often considers the past, present, and future simultaneously when planning. In her research on university change, Kezar (2018) noted that university leadership must recognize what needs to be preserved in an institution as much as what needs to be changed. A leader must have knowledge of designing and implementing change processes (Bornstein, 2003; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Eddy, 2012). Administrators, faculty, and staff often need to adapt their instruction, research, and community service missions in ways that allow their institution to remain true to its values and historic aims, yet respond to opportunities and challenges (Bok, 2013; MacTaggart, 2017). Educational leaders of the future will require an appreciation of the past while thoroughly understanding the intricate demands and complexity a university may face in the future (Bok, 2013). No position has more responsibility for planning for the future of a university than the job of president (Fisher & Koch, 1996; Hendrickson et al., 2013; McFarland, Senn, & Childress, 1993).

Although higher education institutions have always been under pressure to meet internal and external expectations, research suggests that the challenges at the time of this dissertation were complex and ever-increasing (Buller, 2014; Fullan & Scott, 2009; MacTaggart 2017). Institutions of higher education have served many constituencies, both internal and external. Internally, academic leaders serve the needs of students, faculty, and staff. In the future, students, faculty, and staff will be more culturally diverse, and most institutions will compete on a global basis (DeMillo, 2011; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Skinner, 2010). Students will want more curriculum delivery options and will demand what they perceive to be higher quality instruction (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007). Complexities faced by higher education institutions need to be thoroughly understood by academic leadership when designing a strategy for the future (Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Kezar, 2014; Martinez & Wolverton, 2009).

Externally, leaders address wishes and concerns of potential students, parents, alumni, athletic fans, legislators, regulators, and the communities they serve (Burke & Associates, 2005). Legislators and employers want higher graduation rates and plans for lifelong learning in the workforce (Fullan & Scott, 2009). This focus on prioritizing education creates a need for a leader to understand the context of a situation as well as factors involved in addressing complex solutions (Buller, 2014; Christensen & Erying, 2011; DeMillo, 2011; Skinner, 2010). In his research on the American higher education system, Derek Bok (2013) noted an increasing amount of attention turning towards concerns outside the United States, including competition among foreign universities, especially in the European Union, where higher education has become a major priority for funding and development. Additionally, with the overall number of American-born students declining, focus on foreign students and

understanding their markets and needs has become an increasing concern for university leaders (Bok, 2013).

Finances are another significant source of pressure for education administrators. State legislators allocate state budgets to postsecondary public institutions and expect an ever-increasing amount of services delivered; meanwhile, legislators simultaneously reduce the percentage of public funding institutions receive from the state (Buller, 2014). Federal legislators influence institutions by appropriating funds, including support for research priorities, financial aid, and various other income streams for higher education (Burke & Associates, 2005). Both public and private institutions are concerned with raising money from student tuition, athletics, grants, and donations. These funds come with pressures to contain costs, increase services and amenities for students, increase efficiency, assure affordability to students, and these pressures generate a culture of accountability and transparency (Buller, 2014; Burke & Associates, 2005; Keup, Astin, Lindholm, & Walker, 2001; Kezar, 2018).

Kezar (2018) felt different institutions and institution types will need to examine how forces internally and externally affect their planning and strategy for the future. However, a review of literature demonstrated little has been written about leadership specific to various types of institutions (Hendrickson et al., 2013) such as rural institutions. While there is abundant literature on colleges and universities in general, a search yielded little information specific to small, public 4-year institutions located in rural locations. Some literature addressed the importance of small rural community colleges and the challenges and opportunities they face.

In their research on rural community colleges, Katsinas, Mensel, Hagedorn, Friedel, and D'Amico (2012) asserted how important access to education was for rural citizens and communities. Providing educational opportunities and services to rural communities goes well beyond a classroom. A rural university may serve as a catalyst for economic development and social opportunities for a surrounding region. Rural colleges and rural universities are often the only access to education rural citizens have beyond high school. Campus operations offer regional employment. A university community often requires local services. Staff and students purchase local goods. A higher education institution like a rural college or university is bound to provide a proportionally high economic engine in a rural region compared to urban and suburban counterparts. In many cases, rural colleges provide a spark for innovation and support healthy communities (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007). As lifelong learning becomes critical to economic sustainability, and rural locations continue to experience population decline, higher education services in rural communities are likely to become more vital in the future, offering opportunities to retain or attract new citizens. Rural colleges and universities may provide that extra push needed to create sustainability in a rural community.

Sustaining or even growing rural higher education institutions is important to the future of rural communities and a significant responsibility of leaders of these institutions. Effects of local culture on 4-year institutions, both internally and externally, has not been well explored (Eddy, 2013; Kezar, 2001). Understanding the role leadership plays in rural settings as well as experience leaders need that may be specific to rural locations is important to advancing the future of rural higher education.

Pamela Eddy (2013) researched leadership competencies in rural community colleges and suggested future rural leaders of community colleges face several unique challenges including the difficulty of obtaining professional development and recruiting teachers and staff to rural locations. Participants in Eddy's study noted rural colleges face unique challenges including a tight community and higher levels of poverty, and Eddy's participants felt collaboration and context was essential to planning (Eddy, 2013).

What do these pressures mean for the future of small, rural-based 4-year institutions? Will their experiences be different than those expressed by community colleges? What type of leadership skills and abilities will be needed to meet these challenges? This study attempted to address leadership competencies identified as needed for the future of rural, public institutions in the Upper Midwest.

For this study, criteria for choosing size of institution to include was based on The Carnegie Classification of Institutions® (2017b). Institutions eligible to participate were very small (< 1,000 full time equivalent students enrolled), small (1000 to 2,999 full time equivalent students enrolled), or medium (3,000 to 9,999 full time equivalent students enrolled) in size to participate. All participating institutions were located in areas remote or distant from urban areas as identified by the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.). Since the largest enrollment of an institution participating in this study numbered 6,868 FTE (full-time equivalent) students, which rounds to 7,000 FTE students, 7,000 was used to describe the cut-off in size of institutions participating in this study. Institutions with larger headcounts were among the smallest in their system, located in remote or distant locations and had a relatively large post-secondary options enrollment (PSEO) benefitting rural high school students. So, part of their headcount figures were actually high school students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to expand the existing body of research on leadership by closing a gap in knowledge about presidential leadership competencies that affect small, public universities of less than 7,000 enrollment servicing predominantly rural areas in the Upper Midwest. The study will also serve to inform educators and hiring committees as they seek to prepare and appoint university leaders in the future.

Conceptual Framework

The presidential leadership competencies framework for this study was adapted from research conducted by McDaniel (2002), Smith (2007), Smith and Wolverton (2010), and Buller (2014). Examining leadership challenges in higher education, Smith and Wolverton (2010) found that leaders often balance interests of an internal environment with interests of external stakeholders. As higher education is a complex environment, Smith and Wolverton's research supported the idea that defining necessary competencies for presidents such as needed knowledge, skills, and abilities is important for effective leadership and increases the likelihood of positive organizational outcomes. The conceptual framework for this study was used to formulate questions for a qualitative study using interviews and qualitative analysis techniques.

In her research working with the American Council on Education (ACE) Fellows program, McDaniel (2002) identified four categories of competencies that educational leaders should possess: content, process, communication, and context. Content competencies refer to concepts such as understanding higher education and strategic planning. Process competencies involve leadership style, behaviors, and traits of strong leaders. Communication competencies are associated with the ability to express views orally and in

writing, civilly address controversial issues, articulate a vision, and foster multiple

perspectives (McDaniel, 2002).

These first three categories of competencies have been universally studied and are

often universally applied (Fisher & Koch, 1996; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin,

2006). However, researchers have asserted universal application of competencies can be a

mistake. Leaders need to be contextually aware of the dynamics of their institutions (Buller,

2014; Kezar, 2018; Schein, 2010; Smith & Wolverton, 2010). It is the fourth category of

competencies, context, which is institution specific and requires educational leaders to

possess a deeper understanding of their institution as it relates to their immediate

environment and constituencies (Buller, 2014; McDaniel, 2002).

Due to the significance of "context" to leaders, Smith (2007) used nomological

network analysis to further break this category into three components: cultural context,

organizational context, and constituency context competencies. Cultural context

competencies involve recognizing the culture and cultural norms of an institution and

utilizing this knowledge in decision making. Organizational context refers to understanding

complex issues related to the higher education system. A leader addressing organizational

context must be able to relate this broader system to their specific institution (Smith, 2007).

Often, it is the organizational context that defines a strategy designed by a leader (Kezar &

Eckel, 2002).

The final context specific competency is constituency context. This complex

category involves understanding needs and sentiments of various stakeholder groups of an

institution, both internally and externally. These can include faculty, staff, students, alumni,

government, industry, media, and a local community (Smith, 2007; Ratcliffe & Ratcliffe,

2015). In the literature, researchers have often defined these constituencies as government and market. These forces are often the driving forces of change (Buller, 2014; Burke & Associates, 2005). Based on work by McDaniel (2002), Smith (2007), and Smith and Wolverton (2010), the conceptual framework used to guide the initial work of this study is outlined in Figure 1.
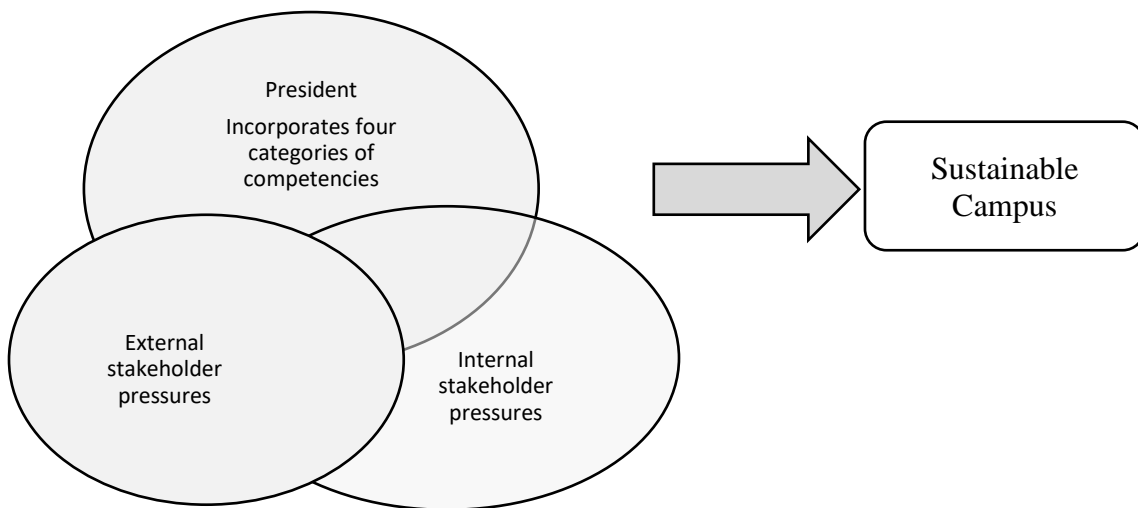
Figure 1. Conceptual framework – Presidential leadership competencies framework.

Leadership has been universally studied; however, different leadership styles and decisions arise depending upon circumstances and needs of an institution (Kezar, 2001). Leadership competencies combined create a leadership process that informs the direction of an institution, especially in developing the multiple plans involved in leading an institution of higher learning (Martinez & Wolverton, 2009; McDaniel, 2002). When competencies are present in an individual, that implies the individual has knowledge to effectively perform a job (Eddy, 2012; Rowley, 2007). Through these competencies, leaders effectively identify processes that inform their decision making (Bess & Dee, 2008). Combining desired

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leadership competencies with an appropriately designed process creates a desired institutional future (Buller, 2014). Although each leader and their style was distinct, an aggregated process composed of common elements discussed by participants for informing decision making (rather than specific competencies) emerged during the progress of this study.

Research Question

The research question was, "What leadership competencies are needed to plan for a sustainable, small, rural college or university as defined by college and university presidents of public rural institutions in the Upper Midwest with headcount enrollments of less than 7,000 full time equivalent students serving predominantly rural stakeholders." While a headcount of 7,000 students exceeds the Carnegie classification definition of small institution, the institutions identified for this study were considered among the smallest in their relative system, often with headcounts seemingly large due to post-secondary education options offered to rural high schools in their region. In other words, some of the enrolled students were high school students.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Educational Leadership Studies

Given challenges faced by higher education, educators have little research or understanding of presidential leadership competencies that may be needed to meet future pressures in higher education specific to rural institutions (Eddy, 2012; Schein, 2010). This study illuminated competencies experts asserted were necessary to build a strong future in small, public institutions with primarily rural stakeholders in the Upper Midwest. Little is known about leadership specific to these institutions. While identifying competencies was

the original goal of the research, the presidential interviews also identified capabilities, defined differently than competencies, critical to leadership. Eventually, a robust leadership process common to leaders of these rural institutions emerged. Understanding and enhancing the process described by these presidents can help future leaders achieve success vital to sustaining these rural colleges and universities.

Significance to Presidential Hiring Committees and Boards of Trustees

At the time of this study, baby-boomers, who predominantly held upper-level academic leadership positions, were retiring, giving rise to new opportunities for academic leadership. In order to better prepare, select, and hire future leaders, research needed to focus on future skills competencies needed at specific types of institutions (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Smith, 2007). Too often, search committees and boards were following tradition rather than addressing unique needs at their institutions (Buller, 2014; Christensen & Erying, 2011).

At the time of this report, current research that informed hiring committees and boards offered little differentiation in leadership competencies needed among institutional types (Buller 2014; McAdory, 2004). This study was intended to inform future committees and board members about characteristics they might want to consider when hiring educational leaders in small, regional public universities in rural environments.

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Definitions of Terms

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Capability: A level of talent or capacity necessary to achieve outcomes under constantly changing emotional and technical conditions. Relates to personal attributes such as persuasiveness, ability to work in ambiguity and make hard decisions (Scott, Coates, & Anderson, 2008).

Competency: A measurable combination of knowledge, skill, ability, or personal characteristic that is required for effective performance (Marrelli, Tondora, & Hoge, 2005).

Context: Dimensions, trends, and complex issues that relate to a specific system, industry, or society (Smith & Wolverton, 2010).

Culture: A pattern of shared beliefs adapted by an organization as valid for problem solving, external adaption, and internal implementation. New members are taught these beliefs as the right way to think and solve problems (Schein, 2010).

Emotional Intelligence: The ability to regulate one's own emotions and self-awareness as well as the capability to correctly assess and be empathetic to others' thinking and behavior (Goleman, 2011).

Expert: Person demonstrating a combination of experience, competencies, and knowledge in a particular subject (Germain & Ruiz, 2008).

Leadership: The process of transforming or changing followers, creating vision, and articulating goals for followers (Bennis, 1983; Burns, 1978).

President or Chancellor: For a single campus, the highest executive with responsibilities of key decision-making, administering policy, setting goals, and day-to-day leadership of the institution. Some presidents may report to a system head (Rowley, 2007).

Public institution of higher education: In the United States, an institution that receives a direct appropriation from state taxpayer dollars and is responsible to a state-appointed governing board.

Rural: The definition of rural is based on US Census definitions in use by those who work with the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS, n.d.). The

definition includes institutions located in several US Census categories. IPEDS follows the

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definitions of rural and urban as follows:

Town: Distant: Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles

and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.

Town: Remote: Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles

from an urbanized area.

Rural: Fringe: Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5

miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that

is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

Rural: Distant: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but

less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as

well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less

than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Rural: Remote: Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles

from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from

an urban cluster. (National Center for Education Statistics,

n.d., exhibit A)

Small Enrollment: According to The Carnegie Classification of Institutions® (2017b),

small institutions are institutions with 1,000 to 2, 999 FTE students; medium sized

institutions would have 3,000 to 9,999 FTE students enrolled. In this study enrollments of

participating institutions ranged in size from 1,091 to 6,868, and all were located in areas

considered remote or distant from urban areas. For purposes of this study, a small enrollment

was considered a student headcount of 7,000 students or less providing the institution was

located in a setting considered distant or remote from an urban area as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.). Headcounts often included a relatively large number of post-secondary education options for high schools, so some of the students considered "enrolled" were really high school students.

Strategic Foresight: The capability of discovering new trends and articulating unexpressed stakeholder needs, developing strategies that ultimately transform their organization (Lustig, 2015).

Sustainable Institution: From a sociological perspective, a community of individuals that share economic security, a health ecosystem, and social inclusion (Flora & Flora, 2013).

Upper Midwest: Region of the US that includes states of Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

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Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

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It was assumed that appointing leaders with appropriate leadership competencies positively affect the future of institutions (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978; Fisher & Koch, 1996; McFarland et al., 1993). This study assumed universities with substantial rural constituencies or stakeholders were located within rural and remote communities, therefore drawing culture and context from their communities. For purposes of this study, the US Census definition of rural, also utilized by the Integrated Post-Secondary Data System (and the NCES), was used. This study utilized four classifications of rural to draw expert opinion: town, distant; town, remote; rural, distant; and rural, remote. Robert Birnbaum (1992) identified that colleges and universities of smaller size have presidential leaders with a proportionately larger influence on internal stakeholders. For this reason, this study was

limited to public 4-year, baccalaureate degree institutions with headcounts of less than 7,000

or were defined to be smaller rural public institutions.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study included leadership competencies identified by experts ~~to~~

~~be~~ needed at institutions with the following characteristics: offered baccalaureate degrees,

were located in a rural environment, were public, and had an enrollment of 7000 or less full

time undergraduate equivalents. This study focused solely on public institutions in the upper

Midwest states of Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Due to a notable

difference in governance structures, tribal colleges were not included in this study. In

addition, presidents starting to serve in their positions after July 1, 2018, were not included

due to the short amount of time they had spent in their positions. Findings may not apply to

institutions outside the defined region.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter introduced the

problem and outlined a conceptual framework for addressing the issue. The second chapter

is a literature review that guides the conceptual framework, design, and direction of the

study. The third chapter addresses the methodology used to design the study. Chapter IV

describes results of the study, and Chapter V discusses those results.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to identify knowledge, skills, and abilities university presidents identify as needed for future presidents of small, public universities that service predominantly rural constituencies in the upper Midwest. This literature review highlights areas of existing research used to guide development of this study. First, internal and external pressures affecting higher education were examined, revealing a need for a new type of leadership (Kezar et al., 2006). Next, general leadership theories were discussed. Then theories more focused on leadership in higher education were reviewed. In the fourth section, competencies and capabilities research was examined with an increasing focus on those competencies found to be relevant to higher education. The next area explored was existing research on higher education leadership in rural areas. Finally, a discussion of areas of competencies identified as needing additional research were identified, providing a basis for the importance of this study.

Internal and External Pressures in Higher Education Affect Leadership

Higher education institutions have always faced pressure to improve teaching and learning, efficiency, and effectiveness. This is not a new phenomenon; however, many recent pressures are significantly different than those encountered farther in the past (Bok, 2013; Kezar, 2018; Thelin, 2011). Technology and globalization have been creating many challenges, from the way instruction is being delivered to institutional responsibility for the

economic prosperity of regions or even nations (Bok, 2013; Shaffer & Wright, 2010). Institutions face issues of globalization while simultaneously serving local community needs and receiving less financial support than they received in the past, especially publicly funded state institutions (Bok, 2013; Christensen & Erying, 2011; DeMillo, 2011; Fullan & Scott, 2009). Competitive pressures bring concerns over recruitment and enrollment. This is especially true of institutions that serve rural stakeholders. When financial crises occur, these institutions often face serious concerns over viability and long-term sustainability (Baer, 2006; Manning, Campbell, & Triplett, 2004).

To face these challenges, experts believe administrators of higher education institutions need to carefully analyze their circumstances and transform their institutions to remain viable in the future (Bok, 2013; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Christensen & Erying, 2011). Future changes will require leaders that understand the complexities and contexts of their institutions in order to design, allocate resources for, and implement sustainable transformation (Fullan & Scott, 2009; Hendrickson et al., 2013). These emerging pressures potentially require new or different skills and competencies in leaders (Kezar et al., 2006). As Birnbaum (1992) described in his research on universities, smaller institutions tend to have leaders with more relative influence on stakeholders and a broader spectrum of responsibilities than leaders of larger institutions. Smaller public institutions serving primarily rural stakeholders need leaders that possess a great degree of knowledge and competencies specific to their types of institutions (Leist, 2007; Eddy, 2012).

Leadership

Leadership has probably been one of the most vastly studied topics today giving rise to much qualitative and quantitative research. However, despite these efforts, much remains

unknown, and the field of study on leadership is ever evolving. According to Bass (2008), literature on leadership can be found as early as 2300 B.C.E. and takes on many facets, from the development of theory to the solution of problems. Leadership can be defined by traits or characteristics of a leader or by the process of leading (Kezar et al., 2006). Definitions of leadership are plentiful.

As Burns (1978) noted, leadership is little understood. Leaders influence people to achieve particular visions or goals (Yukl, 2013). Inherently, followers, as well as their leaders, must change their behavior, beliefs, or strategies in order to attain established goals, making leaders agents of change (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Kezar and Lester, in their research on higher education leadership and transformation, came to define leadership as being separate from management. Leaders are often engaged for the purpose of creating change or leading an institution in a new direction, especially in the current environment at the time of this study. In fact, some researchers have started referring to change as inherent to the process of leadership (Amey, 2006; Bornstein, 2003; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Torraco & Hoover, 2005).

In addition to the multitude of definitions that exist for leadership, there is a vast body of knowledge on leadership theories and models identified by researchers to explain leadership phenomena as well as provide advice for future applications of leadership styles, processes, competencies, or capabilities (Bass, 2008; Kezar et al., 2006). These theories have evolved over time, but at the time of this report, the greatest advancement in research had occurred over the past 100 years (Bass, 2008; Yukl, 2013). Theories can be universal or contingent. Universal theories assume broad applications (Bass, 2008), while contingent theories match a leadership theory to a specific situation (Northouse, 2007). Prescriptive

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theories describe what a leader must do in order to attain goals and outcomes, where descriptive theories illuminate leadership processes, activities of leaders, and why behaviors occur in particular situations. With so much knowledge being gained, leadership can be considered from many different vantage points. Further, evolution of leadership theories over the past 100 years can be compared over many different bases (Yukl, 2013). However, according to Bass (2008), leadership definitions, models, and theories most often take on one of four forms: the behavior of the leader, the effects of a leader's actions, the process of leadership, or the personal traits of a leader.

First, "great man"/trait theories that cataloged traits of leaders evolved into behavior/style theories. These theories were further refined into situational/contingency theories. These led into transactional/process theories, and then transformational theories. Knowledge gained from leadership scholarship is vast (Bass, 2008). Although the number of associated models and theories that have been developed fill volumes, the following is a brief review of major approaches and popular models that have evolved, especially over the past 100 years (Northouse, 2007) at the time of this report.

Trait Approach

The earliest forms of leadership research attempted to identify and catalog specific traits or qualities of a leader (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, 2003; Northouse, 2007). The Great Man Theory, one of the earliest theories prior to the feminist movement, purported that leadership was inherent in personality traits of a leader (Bolden et al., 2003). Leaders were unique individuals with qualities that surpassed those of others. Stogdill (1948), among others, advanced this concept beyond innate qualities of a leader to traits associated with different types of leadership in different situations. He believed leadership

was a relationship between leaders and followers and could change according to a situation. This concept evolved into several other trait or personality based models, with much research focused on cataloging traits appropriate to leadership (Northouse, 2007). However, according to Bolden et al. (2003), lists cataloging traits of leaders were vast in number and inconsistent. It was difficult to generalize a hypothesis about leadership qualities from a catalog of traits. This gave rise to another wave of leadership research, the study of actions of leaders (Northouse, 2007).

Behavioral/Style Approach

This style or behavioral approach to leadership research focuses on actions leaders take to influence followers. Behaviors of leaders are categorized (Bass, 2008; Northouse, 2007). Northouse identified "who" general kinds of behaviors addressed. One category described task behaviors employed by leaders to achieve objectives. Another category described relationship behaviors leaders employed to generate comfort and trust among followers based on a given situation. Behavioral/style approaches to studying leadership address how these two categories of behaviors in leaders are combined to reach a goal (Bolden et al., 2003; Northouse, 2007; Bass, 2008).

One of the most popular, and enduring, leadership theories in this genre is Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y (Bess & Dee, 2008). Often also classified as a motivational theory, McGregor's model is based upon assumptions a leader has about affected followers (Bolden et al., 2003). According to McGregor, a leader can assume people inherently dislike work and must be coerced into performance or that it is human nature to be motivated by accomplishment and responsibility (McGregor, 1960). The former is known as Theory X, and the latter, Theory Y. This worldview will affect a leader's

leadership style. Under this theory, Theory X leaders behave more authoritatively, and

Theory Y leaders utilize a more participative style (McGregor, 1960).

Contingency or Situational Leadership

Bolden et al. (2003) defined contingency or situational leadership research as

focusing on theories derived from particular sets of circumstances that inform leaders on the

best actions to take in given situations. This is in contrast to behavioral theories that do not

differentiate leadership styles for differing situations. Contingency or situational models also

assume leadership approaches may vary at different levels of an organization, given a

different set of individuals and a different set of objectives.

A popular model in this classification is Fiedler's Contingency model. This model

proposes that a leader's style should be matched with the context of a situation (Fiedler,

1967). Performance of a group should be dramatically improved with the correct match of

leader style to context (Northouse, 2007).

The Hersey-Blanchard leadership model (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) emerged as a

synthesis of previous research. This model is based upon a leadership style being adjusted

according to the maturity level of a follower. A more autocratic, directional style is utilized

with relatively immature followers. A more supportive style is employed when the follower

is more mature and takes more responsibility for directing his/her work performance (Bolden

et al., 2003).

Transactional vs. Transformational Leadership

Until the 1970s, leadership research and theories focused on a leader. Starting in the

1970s, focus shifted to examining the process of leadership that occurs between leaders and

followers. These exchanges gave rise to the study of transactional leadership. In 1978, James

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McGregor Burns was the first to propose two competing theories of leadership, transactional and transformational leadership. He identified transactional leadership as a form where leaders transact or bargain with followers for their performance. In essence, the leader exchanges one thing, often salary, for the performance of the follower. Context and traits of leadership were well researched, but the dynamics of the relationship between leaders and their followers emerged as a research priority (Smith, 2007). In addition to studying actions between followers and leaders, the effects of relationships emerged as important (Bass, 2008).

Conversely, Burns (1978) identified a transformational leader as seeking to satisfy higher needs in followers by motivating them to perform beyond expectations. This results in a transformation in the leader, followers, and an organization.

Arguably, one of the most researched models on transformational leadership is Bass' four component model (Avolio, 2011; Bass, 2008; Kezar et al., 2006; Northouse, 2007). Bass identified four components in this model as: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio, 2011; Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Bass, 2008; Northouse, 2007). Idealized influence includes a leader's role as mentor, exhibiting high standards and ethics. Followers aspire to emulate the leader. Inspirational motivation involves a leader's role in inspiring others through a shared vision. A leader's role in intellectual stimulation includes empowering followers to be innovative and challenge assumptions, including those of their leader and organization as a whole. Finally, the individualized consideration component involves a leader listening to individual needs of followers. When these four components are combined, researchers have ascertained

transformational leadership practices produce greater results in creating and sustaining change than other leadership practices (Avolio, 2011).

Adaptive Leadership

As studies of interactions between followers and leaders progressed, many forms of leadership theory emerged, shifting focus to the effect of leadership on an organization or system. Moving closer to associating leadership with learning, Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) illuminated the importance of a leader "getting on the balcony" and observing an entire system, then identifying the best opportunities for the organization. Adaptive leadership also asserts a leader alleviates stress, builds trust, and provides opportunities for sensemaking. Ultimately, the "work is given back to the people" so they can learn, implement, and create new leaders.

Complexity Theory

As focus in leadership research turned to a systems approach, leadership in a complex, adaptive environment evolved. Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey (2007), identified three types of leadership in complexity theory: adaptive leadership, administrative leadership, and enabling leadership. Adaptive leadership enables transformation by creating learning opportunities. Administrative leadership focuses on tactical actions such as managing a plan and coordinating activities. Successful leaders pay attention to all three components and enable their organizations to thrive through learning and adapting.

Leadership in Higher Education

In addition to leadership studies in general, much research has been conducted on the top leadership position in higher education institutions (Birnbaum, 1992; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Kezar et al., 2006; Padilla, 2005). Since the 1950s, the position of college presidency

has been the subject of much research and analysis (Fisher, Tack, & Wheeler, 1988, MacTaggart, 2017). Like literature on leadership in general, an evolution in research on leadership in education has taken place over time. Fisher et al. (1988) asserted that until their study in the late 1980s, little attention was paid to identifying characteristics of an effective president. During the late 1980s and 1990s, much emphasis was placed on identifying characteristics and traits of the individual holding an institution's top leadership position (Birnbaum, 1992; Fisher et al., 1988).

Researchers of leadership in education have identified many approaches and aspects to leadership to examine, and higher education leadership theory has evolved into exploring the process, context, and effects on followers of leadership (Birnbaum, 1992; Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Kezar et al., 2006; Padilla, 2005). One feature of leadership in higher education that is clearly distinguished from general leadership is the concept of shared governance with faculty (Birnbaum, 1992; Hendrickson et al., 2013; Kerr, 2001). Although a top-level leader, in concert with a governing board, has ultimate authority for operations of an institution, faculty have professional and expert authority in their respective disciplines, giving rise to shared governance of an institution (Kerr, 2001). How well the model of shared governance is developed and fostered by a top executive has a profound influence on the effectiveness of an institution (Hendrickson et al., 2013; Kezar & Lester, 2011).

Asserting that university leadership takes place under organized anarchy, Cohen and March (1986) identified several aspects of a president's position in higher education: personal qualities, relationships with various constituencies, and administrative responsibilities. Within these administrative responsibilities, presidents make decisions and exercise authority in four different domains: operating budget decisions, educational policy

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decisions, tenure decisions, and planning decisions. Since their work, much has been written

to build on Cohen and March's four domains of presidential (administrative) responsibilities.

Beyond responsibilities of a university president, research has expanded to explore the

unique context of higher education, as well as the importance of emotional intelligence

(MacTaggart, 2017; Rupp et al., 2016). Personal capabilities in an administrator have

become more significant than they were in the past (MacTaggart, 2017; Scott et al., 2008).

Scott et al. (2008) identified three domains of capabilities they believed are integrated to

form a strong university leader. These included: personal capabilities (self-regulation,

decisiveness, commitment), interpersonal capabilities (ability to influence and empathize),

and cognitive capabilities (able to diagnose accurately, strategize, be flexible, and be

responsive). Scott et al. explained that leadership capabilities are "underpinned" (p. 18) by

key leadership competencies that Scott et al. described as role specific competencies

(learning and teaching abilities) and more generic competencies (understanding university

operations and having self-organization skills).

Fisher et al. (1988) explored characteristics of a university leader. Focusing on traits

and personal characteristics of "effective" presidents, Fisher et al. found effective college

presidents valued the respect of their followers more so than less effective presidents, tended

to work longer hours, took more risks, didn't rely on consensus, valued creative dissonance

and diversity, fostered organizational flexibility more than organizational structure,

communicated deliberately, were less concerned about being liked, believed strongly that

their institution enabled stakeholders to reach their potential, and tended to find decision

making more difficult than presidents not identified as highly effective. Fisher et al. found

the most important element of institution success was a president's empowering leadership.

In summary, Fisher et al. (1988) found human relation skills as critical to the effectiveness of presidential leaders in university settings.

A seminal work in higher education leadership research is the Institutional Leadership Project (ILP). Conducted over 5 years, the study examined 32 college and university leaders (Birnbaum, 1992). Focusing significantly on how leaders think and influence others, Birnbaum was able to identify several factors critical to effective leadership at top levels. He found three important concepts that contribute to the effectiveness of leaders: cognitive complexity, strategy, and a leader's implicit theories on leadership. Cognitive complexity refers to the ability of an individual to see situations from multiple perspectives. Strategy refers to how leaders set out to achieve organizational goals, and "implicit theories on leadership" refers to the way in which leaders conceptualize leadership (Birnbaum, 1992). One of the most critical findings outlined by Birnbaum was the critical nature of shared governance between a college president and faculty, faculty support, and the way in which cognitive complexity, strategy, and theories-in-use by a president were combined to support governance.

In 1996, James Fisher teamed up with James Koch to examine presidential leadership, power, and the effects of both on a university. Unlike Birnbaum (1992) and Cohen and March (1986), Fisher and Koch (1996) believed presidents can and do make a difference in the effectiveness of higher education institutions. Using the power analysis of French and Raven (1959) combined with elements of transformational leadership identified by Burns (1978) and Bass (2008), Fisher and Koch found that presidents utilize legitimate, expert, and charismatic power to empower and inspire faculty and staff to transform and raise a university to new levels of performance (Fisher & Koch, 1996). Although the nature of an

academy is to avoid discussion of power, Fisher and Koch (1996) determined that the governing board of an institution gives a president legitimate power. So, an effective president utilizes expert and charismatic power to inspire others and transform an institution.

Many believe transformational leadership first emerged in the political writings of Burns in 1978 (Bass, 2008; Kezar et al., 2006). However, Fisher and Koch (1996) found concepts of transformational leadership date back to the founding of Harvard in 1636 and have subsequently been embraced by the American Association of University Professors. Fisher and Koch's sentiments on this involved the nature of faculty and governance. They defined a system of transformational leadership in higher education as indicative of a system that fosters shared governance but holds individuals accountable. It also holds that a university president is the final authority on all matters. By contrast, a modern transactionalist would assert a president has little control and makes little difference while faculty enjoy strong control and consensual governance (Fisher & Koch, 1996).

Building on Fisher et al.'s (1988) study, Fisher and Koch (2004) examined behavior and attitudes of over 700 university presidents in the United States. They posited that transformational leadership requires a president to exhibit entrepreneurial behavior to be effective. This includes taking calculated risks, being willing to disrupt the status quo, engaging in public/private partnerships, and not relying heavily on organizational structure. Fisher and Koch empirically concluded that entrepreneurial presidents can be identified and tend to be more effective than other presidents. Fisher and Koch did, however, caution that their findings would not always work and may not be true in the future. The effectiveness of entrepreneurial presidents was a factor in the current state of higher education (at the time of

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Fisher and Koch's study), and there have been instances where entrepreneurial behavior has failed.

As Fisher and Koch (2004) pointed out, evolution and changes in a higher education enterprise may change the nature and required competencies of university leadership. Padilla (2005) examined, through a case study, presidencies of six extraordinary university presidents from larger complex institutions that faced an array of challenges. Although a specific leadership theory was not suggested, Padilla noted several competencies presidents studied had in common. Competencies included the importance of understanding an institution's history and environment, exhibiting extraordinary intelligence, and well-honed communication skills (Padilla, 2005).

In their updated review on leadership theory and practice, Kezar et al. (2006) recognized leadership is complex and highly context bound. At the time of Kezar et al.'s review, modern leadership study focused on mutual power as well as process. Kezar et al. found that research systems at the time of their study oriented and emphasized that leaders must be culturally intelligent while understanding the complexity and historical context of the organizations they serve. Kezar et al. suggested that approaches to leadership in the future need to focus more on team leadership, learning, and the intellectual complexity of issues.

In addition to leadership in general, Kezar et al. (2006) pointed out the context of leadership in higher education has changed vastly and will not return to historical trends. Globalization, technology, reduced funding, and increasing demands in higher education will require new leadership abilities. This type of leadership will require more research that focuses on culture and the context in which leadership takes place and will suggest that

competencies needed for future leaders may be different than competencies needed in the past. This has proven to be the case in recent university leadership research.

In 2008, Scott et al. researched Australian university leadership and focused on a leader's responsibility to transform their institution. Further, Scott et al. defined change as a learning process. Their findings divided attributes required of higher education leadership between competencies and capabilities. Competence has been described as "the quality or state of having sufficient knowledge, judgment, skill, or strength (as for a particular duty or in a particular respect)" ("Competence," 2019, para. 1a). More associated with skills and knowledge, competencies are necessary for an individual to perform well in a specific role (knowing how to teach, understanding university operations). Capable has been defined as "having the ability, fitness, or quality necessary to do or achieve a specified thing" ("Capable," 2019, para. 1). Scott et al. distinguished capabilities as talent, capacity, or tacit understanding in an individual to see "the big picture," deliver positive outcomes, and calmly make critical decisions in a complex environment. The difference between the two is subtle. Capable is more inherent and refers to a person's inherent abilities or tendencies towards being able to accomplish something. Maybe having the disposition to perform a certain task. Competent refers to learning, having sufficient skill, knowledge, or qualifications to perform a task like teaching or understanding university operations. Scott et al.'s model posits a learning leader has personal capabilities, interpersonal capabilities, cognitive capabilities, generic competencies, and role-specific competencies. Scott et al. identified leadership as a learning, change process focusing on how all involved learn and make sense of information in order to adapt to a changing environment.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU; Rupp et al., 2016) recently published their research on leadership attributes experts found to be critical to the presidency of an educational institution. They identified management competencies, interpersonal competencies, personal characteristics, and leadership competencies as important characteristics in a leader as well as having positive expectations of success and being achievement oriented as key personal traits for a leader to possess. Management competencies include knowledge of higher education and understanding of an organization as an enterprise requiring resource allocation and stewardship. Important interpersonal competencies identified include positive and active engagement, relationship building, climate creation and maintenance, as well as outstanding communication. Personal characteristics encompass integrity, servant leadership, continuous self-improvement, and resilience.

Understanding higher education as an enterprise and understanding the importance of "sophisticated change leadership" is the basis of Terrance MacTaggart's (2017) Enterprise Leadership model. This model asserts the importance of understanding challenges faced by an institution and that time will be necessary to design appropriate change strategies needed. Enterprise leaders understand that higher education is not a business, but if the business side of an institution fails, academics suffers. Enterprise leaders possess significant emotional intelligence and create enabling conditions in order for faculty and staff to adapt. Dr. MacTaggart's model also stresses the importance of each institution establishing and clearly understanding its value to all stakeholders.

Bolman and Gallos (2011) used their personal experience as well as case studies to develop a model for leadership that addresses a leader's ability to transform an institution. In

this model, Bolman and Gallos asserted a leader must understand three main concepts. First, a leader must know how to create links between thinking, learning, and effective actions. Secondly, a leader must understand the complexity and major challenges of an institution. Finally, a leader must develop strategies for personal life balance and continued leadership development. Originally proposed by Gallos (2008), Bolman and Gallos (2011) identified five Bs a leader must address: boundaries, biology, balance, beauty, and bounce. Boundaries refers to a leader's ability to absorb concerns of others and be empathetic without personalizing the issues. Biology refers to staying healthy. Balance refers to relieving stress and balancing negative emotions with positive emotions. Beauty refers to deliberately making time for activities that rejuvenate perspective such as writing, reading, or listening to music. Finally, bounce refers to having resilience in times of challenging trauma or stress. Combining the three main concepts a leader in higher education has to understand (as described earlier in this paragraph) with good personal habits (the five Bs) assists a leader in maintaining stamina necessary to transform an organization (Bolman & Gallos, 2011).

Finally, although much research has been done on identifying models, theories, and competencies for making a leader effective and successful, some researchers have focused on identifying what leaders should not do, or characteristics and activities a leader should promote. Understanding what characteristics or actions should be avoided could prove to be as critical as identifying positive traits and actions (Padilla, 2005; Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Bogue, 2013). Padilla (2005) identified characteristics that diminish the effectiveness of university leadership. They include extravagant spending on personal items such as office décor or trips, moodiness, arrogance, insensitivity, distrust, perfectionism, over ambition, and difficulty transforming faculty and staff.

In a later study, Trachtenberg et al. (2013) focused specifically on university leadership derailment. They identified six overarching themes that predict failure in a presidency. Like Padilla, Trachtenberg et al. identified unethical lapses including anything from overspending to hoarding information as signs of dysfunction. Poor interpersonal skills such as tempers, poor communication, and arrogance contribute to a downfall. Lack of ability to lead various constituencies, especially key elements such as a board and faculty are of concern. Incongruence with the culture and context of an institution often leads to a derailment. Board dysfunction including poor presidential search processes to dysfunctional dynamics to conflicts of interest often leads to the demise of a presidency. Finally, failing to meet objectives of an academic enterprise such as budgets, advancement, and enrollment often cause a president to stumble.

Although descriptive in nature, insights into characteristics and actions that may cause the downfall of a leader can be imperative in identifying potential areas for improvement or avoidance. Understanding these characteristics can aid in also identifying competencies that avoid disastrous leadership (Padilla, 2005; Trachtenberg et al., 2013).

Leadership Competencies

Given the complexity of higher education enterprises and challenges leaders may meet, it is imperative leaders of educational institutions are prepared (Bok, 2013; Eddy, 2012; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Kezar et al., 2006). The original intent of the research was built upon identifying competencies leaders felt were important for rural leaders. While collecting and analyzing data, though, the research evolved into formulating a grounded theory that describes the process of leadership and gives a more complete picture of what is needed in an

effective leader; competencies were one component of the picture describing leadership, and are still an important component of leadership.

Identifying and developing competencies in future leaders is one way to assure needs for higher education are met (Eddy, 2012; McDaniel, 2002). In their work on human resource development, Marrelli, Tondora, and Hoge (2005) defined a competency as a measurable combination of knowledge, skill, and ability required for performance in a particular position. According to Ruben (2006), a competency requires both understanding of a subject and skill in implementation. Knowledge informs practice and practice informs knowledge (Agnew, 2014; Ruben, 2006). Each leadership theory, model, or perspective requires leaders to possess some set of competencies to be effective (Agnew, 2014; McDaniel, 2002; Smith, 2007). Research has shown that many acts of a leader, including developing a vision and leading a strategic planning process are conducted so confidence in a leader's competencies can be instilled in followers (Agnew, 2014; Birnbaum, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 2003; Padilla, 2005).

In her research while engaged with the American Council on Education, McDaniel (2002) catalogued knowledge and skills of executive leaders in higher education. She divided leadership competencies into four categories or themes: content, process, communication, and context capabilities. Content refers to the various functions of higher education such as academics, student affairs, advancement, and athletics. Process competencies denote understanding of leadership in general, including change processes and other processes necessary to achieve outcomes. Communication competencies cover three types of communication: verbal, nonverbal, and written (McDaniel, 2002). Context competencies refer to a leader's understanding of complex issues as they relate to the higher

education system. This would include knowledge of shared governance, institutional culture, and the ability to navigate a highly politicized environment. Research gathered in higher education content, higher education process, and communication has been generalized and can be applied universally to leadership in most higher education institutions (Freeman & Kochan, 2013; Kezar et al., 2006).

Content Competencies

Foundational knowledge such as the history of higher education is an important knowledge base for leaders in higher education (Freeman & Kochan, 2013). Having an understanding of how the higher education enterprise has evolved and the conditions under which it now must operate can have a tremendous impact on designing future strategic efforts (Bok, 2013; Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Thelin, 2011). Higher education institutions are highly complex organizations that operate under an ever-changing environment, making it imperative that an organization's head understands the systems and functions of their institution thoroughly (Kezar et al., 2006). Additionally, understanding the complicated nature of university funding streams, budgets, and related systems are vital to making appropriate decisions (Freeman & Kochan, 2013).

Process Competencies

Process competencies emphasize leadership through interactions between leaders and followers. These include relationship building and emotional intelligence (MacTaggart, 2017). These competencies identify the importance of enabling people and appreciating ideals beyond oneself (McDaniel, 2002).

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Communication Competencies

Ikenberry (2010) noted that good communication skills are critical to the success of a university leader. A university leader is often seen as the face of a university and must be prolific at public speaking (Freeman & Kochan, 2013). Technology and electronic mail have created an abundance of possible venues for individuals to personally communicate with university presidents. This has created a necessity for a leader to be able to communicate personally to a wide variety of constituents as well as sort through a tremendous amount of data to determine what needs to be addressed (Ikenberry, 2010). Not only must a leader determine what needs to be addressed and to whom, but also be able to appeal to a diverse group of stakeholders with a varying amount of communication styles (Freeman & Kochan, 2013).

Context Competencies

In exploring the efficacy of McDaniel's model as it applies to athletic directors, student affairs officers, and chief academic officers, Smith (2007) used nomological networks to further refine "context competencies" into three subcategories. "Organizational context competencies" are identified as those related to a university leader's understanding of the higher education system in general. Smith found that effective leaders must be able to relate their knowledge of higher education to their specific institution. "Cultural context competencies" refers to a leader's knowledge of specific institutional culture and their ability to use this knowledge in decision making. This knowledge would include history, traditions, and governance patterns of an institution. Finally, "constituency context competencies" refers to an educational leader's ability to build relationships with their Board of Trustees and other external stakeholders such as alumni, community leaders, and accrediting agencies. A

higher education leader must navigate among all of these stakeholders in a highly politicized environment (Smith, 2007; Smith & Wolverton, 2010). These three subcategories of context competencies are more likely to be institution or institution-type specific. It is these three context competencies subcategories that have been identified by experts as being a high priority for additional research, especially in the evolution of leadership research (Kezar, 2001; Kezar et al., 2006).

Cultural context competencies. In analyzing leadership, the study of culture has long been an established practice (McDaniel, 2002; Schein, 2010; Smith, 2007). However, few studies have been conducted that identify the competencies important to performance of an administrator given a particular type of cultural context (Siegel, 2011; Smith, 2007).

Two different types of culture—internal campus culture and external community culture—are critical to understand when becoming a campus leader (Siegel, 2011). Siegel's research found symbolism in a presidency can be one of the most central tools for effectiveness; therefore, thoroughly understanding both cultures and utilizing a position effectively within them is crucial. Siegel found knowledge of a cultural context also vital to effectively bringing together groups within a culture with disparate beliefs. Moreover, Siegel (2011) found that to be successful, a president must not only understand their cultural environment, but must also demonstrate respect and effectively utilize cultural norms and values of an institution, both internally and externally. This is especially important when designing a vision and strategic plan and implementing a design to be achieved by faculty and staff (Eddy, 2012; Siegel, 2011; Smith, 2007).

University cultures are uniquely complex (Kezar et al., 2006; Smith, 2007). Keup et al. (2001) found higher education rich in traditions, customs, values, and beliefs. Arriving at

a cultural definition for a university system is complex as there are many sub-communities, sometimes conflicting, at a university. Burton Clark (1983) identified nested groupings within the academic culture of a university: discipline, enterprise, profession, and system. All facets must be considered when designing initiatives.

Rural culture context. Leading a public institution in a rural environment presents both challenges and opportunities. Rural areas, on average, are characterized by higher poverty than urban areas, declining resources, and poorer college readiness (Eddy, 2013; Flora & Flora, 2013).

Rural communities are often remote and are more likely to have citizens involved in multiple roles; a mayor may be the local storekeeper and a school board member (Flora & Flora, 2013). Citizens are often more tightly networked (high social capital) and resistant to change. Rural communities exhibit higher political capital; rural citizens have greater access to their legislative process and exercise relatively greater legislative influence than their urban counterparts (Flora & Flora, 2013). Many operate in persistent poverty with a higher percentage of aging individuals in their population (Flora & Flora, 2013). Unlike in the past, there is a general reduction in the population of farmers and number of people needed to farm in a highly technical, ever changing environment. Although reliance on a farm economy is diminishing, rural communities can still be disproportionately affected by the global economy due to farm contributions to national exports. Further, most farms have at least one household leader working off-farm; also, women are increasingly working away from their farms (Flora & Flora, 2013). Social or cultural characteristics in rural areas can lead to an intense need for technical assistance to solve problems, giving rise to opportunities for rural

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citizens to be involved in regional universities (Flora & Flora, 2013). Understanding the complexity of these issues is of paramount importance (Eddy, 2012).

In 2007, Jay Leist conducted research on community college presidents operating and residing in rural communities and found that a rural leader may require certain traits or competencies different than those necessary for successful leadership in other environments. Leist found local community colleges are often an only source for community enrichment. His research found three specific areas in which rural college presidents must possess competencies different than urban/suburban counterparts in what he defined as situational awareness, telling the story, and rural roots (Leist, 2007).

"Situational awareness" refers to rural thinking that tends to be narrower and less adept at flexibility and change (Eddy, 2012; Flora & Flora, 2013). Locals expect a president and family to readily assimilate into their culture and customs. Rural culture is steeped in traditions and expectations that can span generations. A president needs to be exceedingly accessible and active in their community and must possess great memories as constituents expect a president and his/her family to know everyone. Difficult decisions can become community issues complete with vilification of a president. The issue of diversity is often quite different than urban/suburban counterparts. Diversity is not just race, but backgrounds, income, professions, and vocations (Leist, 2007).

"Telling the story" refers to the fact that a president must understand where local citizens have been in the past and create a future without disrupting local culture. A president must know local folklore, customs, and symbolism of a community and a campus. Rural citizens tend to have narrower world views and want their leaders to show they are interested in and care about their rural culture (Leist, 2007).

Having "rural roots" might be critical as a president with rural experience can understand and assimilate their actions quicker (Leist, 2007; Flora & Flora, 2013). Leist's conclusion is that institutional leaders of tomorrow must understand different cultural dynamics in rural, urban, and suburban settings both internally and externally to effectively make organizational decisions.

Eddy (2013) also found the almost celebrity status of presidents and their families cause struggles different than larger urban areas where presidents and their families live in relative anonymity. Eddy also found internal campus decisions such as staff cuts have a greater impact and are a larger community issue in rural areas than in urban areas. Citizens often feel a college can solve all of a community's challenges (Eddy, 2013).

Kezar (2018) found institutional change on specific campuses is highly dependent upon the culture of an institution. However, much of the study of leadership in change processes is universal and addresses issues such as achieving buy-in or communication. Culture and context are significantly related to the success of change initiatives, yet are often not the subject of research as these concepts cannot be broadly applied across institutions.

A leader must be aware and plan for how culture both internally and externally impacts decisions (Eckel, Green, Hill, & Mallon, 1999; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Schein, 2010). If cultural norms are violated, planned transformations will not last (Schein, 2010). In their research on organizational development, Torraco and Hoover (2005) noted the change process must be adapted to the culture, mission, and environment of an institution. One-size-fits-all models are not successful. Therefore, it is important for leaders, and those selecting leaders, to understand the capabilities and competencies rural leaders need to excel in rural public institutions.

Organizational context competencies. Higher education institutions are interdependent organizations. Several organizations operate together, including disciplinary societies, associations, accreditation agencies, the federal government, and other stakeholder forces acting together to form a unique ecology of higher education. In her work in higher education, Adrianna Kezar (2001) suggested elements unique to higher education need to be considered when developing transformative initiatives, elements such as: interdependent organizations, relatively independent environments, the unique culture of an academy, institutional status, values-driven multiple power and authority structures, loosely coupled systems, organized anarchical decision-making, professional and administrative values, shared governance, employee commitment and tenure, goal ambiguity, image, and success.

Higher education has complex and contrasting values. Sub-communities have many common values such as: importance of research, integrity of research, academic freedom, freedom to teach, and shared governance. For each sub-community, access to higher education is common but tends to be distinct in each discipline. Faculty and administration have values different than students. And, this complexity grows with diversity (Kezar, 2001).

Constituency context competencies. The final guiding subcategory within context competencies is constituency context competencies and involves all of the external stakeholders of an institution from a Board of Trustees to athletic attendees (Smith, 2007). A subcomponent of this subcategory will be constituencies existing when a campus resides in a rural environment. According to Blake Gumprecht's (2008) research on American college towns, presence of a college as well as the administration, faculty, staff, and students of a college have a significant impact on culture in a community.

Often, rural is defined by that which is not metropolitan or urban. In the case of the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA), *rural* is defined as any community of less than 2,500 people with all else urban (Isserman, 2005). This, however, does not fit most people's notion of rural, nor does it take into consideration rural culture and context (Bell, 2007). In his research on rural scholarship, Michael Bell noted that rural should be considered in what he noted as first rural and second rural viewpoints. The first rural viewpoint defines rural as open space, most notably in the United States by the USDA/ERS. The second rural viewpoint concerns association. Associations include the culture and context of a rural setting; associations are connections we make such as the connection between rural and food; community and natural resources is an example of a positive association, and isolation and desolation are examples of a more negative association (Bell, 2007). This study focused more on the "second rural" viewpoint; however, for sampling purposes, criteria borrowed from the "first rural" viewpoint will also be utilized.

Fluharty and Scaggs (2007) noted that administrative staff size tends to be smaller and staff members have more responsibilities at community colleges located in rural environments. They also noted that higher education institutions in rural communities can have a major influence on economic and community development. Because administrations are smaller with more responsibilities, administrators of rural institutions often face difficulties in accessing needed resources to serve their missions (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007).

Many internal and external constituents of rural institutions live in surrounding communities, and therefore, share rural culture. In their research interviewing youth leaving rural communities, Carr and Kefalas (2009) pointed out some entrenched perceptions of rural culture, including: citizens are purposefully remote and wish to preserve their culture,

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communities are isolated from the rest of the world, and communities are frozen in time. Given a university culture steeped in tradition and history, these two cultures (entrenched perceptions of rural culture and a university culture steeped in tradition and history) combined could create a significant force against change, making it critical for a university leader to be thoughtful and considerate of cultural context when designing change initiatives (Kezar & Eckel, 2002).

On the other hand, in his research on American college towns, Blake Gumprecht (2008) asserted that communities containing institutions of higher learning differ from surrounding communities without higher education institutions in many ways. Rural communities that house institutions of higher learning have a higher-than-average educated work force, often have a relative absence of heavy industry, are more diverse, are relatively more affluent, and often have more developed cultural amenities than similar communities without higher education. Gumprecht found that the degree of difference is a function of the overall percentage of college students to the overall population. This factor may cause notable differences in the culture of communities containing rural education institutions and communities that do not.

Another interesting dichotomy of rural is that an external constituency of a rural institution maybe be affected by rural culture and context as well as an internal constituency including students. However, as Schafft and Youngblood Jackson (2010) outlined in their research on higher education and rural students, institutions need to better research rural traditions, experiences, and heritage of their rural-based students in order to more effectively serve them. A change in an institution's internal constituents to better understand rural

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culture would benefit student development and lead to effective leadership of an institution (McDaniel, 2002; Schafft & Youngblood Jackson, 2010; Smith, 2007).

At the time of this study, recent literature not only focused on competencies and capabilities of leaders,but addressed whole organizations in the leadership process. Emerging from this concept the notion that leaders and their organizations thrive because they continually learn and adapt to their circumstances and surroundings. A leader engages in a process of continual learning and then enables others to discover and learn (Lustig, 2015).

Learning Organizations

In his research on organizational leadership, Peter Senge (1990) noted that a majority of institutions historically were focused on controlling actions rather than creating a culture that rewarded individuals for learning and creativity. He asserted this resulted in mediocre organizational performance. Senge purported that encouraging an institutional culture that values discovery and learning builds organizational capacity to thrive by enabling the organization to readily adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities. His work indicates that leaders of learning organizations make a choice to serve and empower the individuals they lead by building shared vision and encouraging learning across their organizations. Argyris (1995) described this type of learning as taking one of two forms: identifying and correcting errors and/or matching opportunities with outcomes for the first time. Creating an environment that builds on these forms of learning creates a platform for advancing learning organizations.

Components of a learning organization include: fostering systems thinking, adapting a learning culture, understanding strategic drivers of success, and integrating all of these

components throughout the organization (Senge, 1990; Yang, Watkins & Marsick, 2004). Leaders of these institutions engage in empowering learning, fostering inquiry, encouraging team learning, and developing a collective vision with all levels of the organization. They build administrations that connect the organization to internal and external opportunities, promote systems thinking, and consistently empower learning (Yang, Watkins, & Marsick, 2004). Promoting these ideals has been shown to increase organizational knowledge as well as increase organizational performance (Argyris, 1995; Senge, 1990; Yang, Watkins, & Marsick, 2004).

Conclusions

Whether in the 1980s or more recent times, much of the literature is in agreement that more could be done to prepare individuals for leadership in higher education (Fisher, Tack, & Wheeler, 1988; Fullan & Scott, 2009). Understanding the complex process faced by leaders of colleges and universities is necessary for recruiting effective leaders and for preparing individuals to successfully fill open leadership positions, and is imperative to the future of higher education (White & Eckel, 2010). This understanding was advanced by interviewing current small, rural institutional leaders and gaining perspective on what they feel is important to consider in moving forward.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on competencies that selected university presidents have identified as being important in meeting the challenges of small, regional four-year institutions with less than 7,000 students enrolled; these institutions are public and located in rural areas in Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. This chapter discusses the process and procedures that were used to conduct this study.

Rationale Behind Research Question

The study of leadership competencies and related needs of future university presidents is a highly complex issue (Hendrickson et al., 2013). Competencies presidents may need can vary depending on type of institution being led, governance factors, and internal and external environments. Identifying needed competencies of leaders and planning for development is complicated (Freeman & Kochan, 2013). This is especially true of universities located in remote rural and small-town areas where the effect of local culture on a four-year institution both internally and externally has not been well explored (Eddy, 2013; Kezar, 2001).

Due to the paucity of research in this area and the complexity of university systems and leadership, I chose a qualitative research design for this study. During the literature review, the need for a grounded theory study became apparent. After 17 interviews with university presidents in higher education at small rural institutions and analysis of data to

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determine context and meaning of the data, a process of leadership at these institutions emerged for grounded theory research (Creswell, 2014). This research design also identified competencies needed by leaders of rural universities in the Upper Midwest. A qualitative design is appropriate when exploring a human phenomenon such as leadership, capturing experiences of selected participants, and gaining an understanding of their perspectives (Creswell, 2002; Lichtman, 2013). A qualitative study is designed to incorporate an organization in its entirety, including culture and related phenomenon as they unfold in interviews, as opposed to testing specific variables (Lichtman, 2013). Participants' experiences with leadership phenomena were used to classify and develop a theory about leadership needed to create sustainability in rural institutions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Through the grounded theory approach used in this study, I considered (focused on) culture and rural settings through stories selected university presidents shared at these types of rural institutions. The inductive design, exploring first by interviewing and then analyzing the transcripts specific to each president (or chancellor), then analyzing data to seek potential generalities among experiences or to understand a phenomenon was appropriate (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lichtman, 2013).

According to Marilyn Lichtman (2013), designing a generalized rather than specific research protocol at the inception of a qualitative study is appropriate as the purpose of qualitative research is to remain fluid and adjust to new information as it becomes available. For that reason, this study was designed to be exploratory in the beginning and become more specific as information unfolded from participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Seidman, 2013). In order to identify potential challenges and related leadership competencies, data was gathered by interviewing university presidents with at least a year's experience at leading

rural types of institutions. Participants were from a convenience sample of presidents

working in rural universities in Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota at the

time of this study. Elizabeth McDaniel's (2002) ACE work on leadership competencies was

used to frame this research. However, the process was designed to be fluid and was adapted

as new knowledge and circumstances emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lichtman, 2013). A

grounded theory approach was used as it is designed to enable researchers to use analysis

tools that reveal experiences of participants and how they determine meaning through their

experiences and related culture. Grounded theory focuses on providing context for

participants' experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Participant and Site Selection

Adler and Ziglio (1996) identified "experts" as having experience and unique skills or

knowledge in a particular subject and noted that experts' responses would be more

meaningful than if a general population responded. I recruited participants from working

university presidents (chancellors) with experience in leading 4-year institutions with

headcounts of 7,000 students or less located in rural remote or distant locations as identified

in the IPEDS database. Although a headcount of 7,000 students exceeds the Carnegie

definition of small, institutions included were the smallest in their system. For example, two

of the institutions in this study were the smallest 4-year educational institutions in their state,

even though their Carnegie definition listed them as medium in size.

Participating universities were located in one of four states: Minnesota, Nebraska,

North Dakota, or South Dakota. Originally, six states were to be included in the study.

However, after having some difficulty getting presidents to accept invitations to be

interviewed on Skype, the research design was changed to use snowball sampling through

referrals and face-to-face, on-site interviews. Snowball sampling, where one expert

recommends another, yielded fast results with eight presidents accepting and only one

president declining to be interviewed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This type of sample also

yielded enough interviews in four states to reach saturation, critical to grounded theory

research (Seidman, 2013). Nine presidents were interviewed. Saturation was reached when

the last of the presidential interviews, out of 17 interviews, did not reveal any substantive

new information. Additionally, all information gathered was consistent among all four states

with only minor distinctions in describing leadership actions and surrounding communities.

A research of the IPEDS College Navigator system revealed 16 institutions with

presidents that met this study's criteria, as displayed in Appendix A. Criteria used to identify

institutions eligible to participate in this study were the institution had to: (a) be located in

Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, or Wisconsin; (b) be a public

institution that offered bachelor's degrees; (c) have enrollments of less than 7,000 headcount

students; and (d) be located in a rural area such as "town: remote," "town: distant," "rural:

remote," or "rural: distant" location as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics

(n.d.). Working presidents of these institutions were considered a purposeful sample of

experts for this study.

Participants were recruited through a snowballing process. First, an introductory e-

mail outlining the purpose of the study was sent by a trustee in the Minnesota State College

and University System to presidents that qualified for the study. All presidents responded

positively. During the first round of interviews, these presidents were asked to provide

names of other presidents in qualifying states that might be interested in participating in the

study, considering necessary travel. The goal was to recruit eight presidents. Eight

presidents responded positively and participated in the first round of interviews. One

president dropped out, so another president was identified and interviewed twice. Results

from all interviews, including the president that dropped out of Round 2, were considered in

the analysis of data.

Originally, in order to respect the time of participants and increase the number of

participants completing the study, three participants were to be selected at a time by using a

random selection process in Excel. Switching to a snowball sampling process resulted in

such rapid progress that five presidents were interviewed before I could prepare a second

round of interviews. Results from interviews were coded and analyzed for themes using

ATLAS.ti (Version 8.4) software. Once complete, codes were discussed with my advisor,

and I consulted a Minnesota State Trustee experienced in research to develop a second round

of questions. The second round of interviews occurred concurrently with first interviews of

the final four presidents who consented to be interviewed. In all, the process from first

interview of the first president to last interview of the last president took 5 months, from

February to July of 2018.

Human Subjects

Protection of participants as well as participants understanding their rights is an

important component of research design and implementation. Approval by the University of

North Dakota's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received to gain guidance and assure

no harm came to human subjects. Confidentiality and anonymity of both participants and

their institutions was a vital part of this protection (Lichtman, 2013).

Although an absolute guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity cannot be given due

to the limited number of potential participants meeting this study's criteria, participants were

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informed of potential risks through an IRB approved informed consent document. This consent form was supplied to each participant prior to their first interview and required participants' signatures before beginning the interview. Each president was given a pseudonym to assist with confidentiality. A code book linking presidents to their institutions was kept separate from other data in ATLAS.ti (Version 8.4). All data have been scheduled to be destroyed after a minimum of 3 years following completion of this project.

Participants

Although the stories of each president were robust and unique, collectively the nine presidents gave a holistic representation of critical functions a president needs to perform in small rural universities. All nine possessed an earned doctorate; six held a Doctorate of Philosophy while three held a Doctorate of Education. All except one held some type of degree associated with leadership, management, or business-related subjects. Seven held degrees in education or instruction.

In regard to educational background, participants collectively represented both the academic and the enterprise side of an institution. Looking at career experience of participants, six served in academic affairs positions during their careers and four either studied or served in student affairs. Seven were hired from outside their institutions when they became president, and two were promoted from within. Their length of service ran anywhere from 1 to 21 years. Finally, none had served as a president prior to their current appointment at the time of this study. Table 1 lists pseudonyms used in this study to identify presidents interviewed and the Carnegie description of institutions where each president worked.

Table 1

Pseudonyms of Participants and Brief Descriptions of Their Institutions

Pseudonym	Carnegie Classification / Description of Participant's Institution
Dr. Morgan	"M3: Master's Colleges and Universities – Smaller programs"* / Located in a remote town.**
Dr. Parker	"M2: Master's Colleges and Universities – Medium programs"* / Located in a remote town.**
Dr. Stewart	"Baccalaureate Colleges"*** with an "Arts & Sciences Focus"**** / Located in a remote town.**
Dr. Bailey	"M3: Master's Colleges and Universities – Smaller programs"* / Located in a distant town.**
Dr. Coleman	"M2: Master's Colleges and Universities – Medium programs"* / Located in a remote town.**
Dr. Barnes	"Baccalaureate Colleges"*** offering "Diverse Fields"**** / Located in a remote rural area.**
Dr. Ward	"M3: Master's Colleges and Universities – Smaller programs"* / Located in a remote rural area.**
Dr. Jenkins	"M2: Master's Colleges and Universities – Medium programs"* / Located in a distant town.**
Dr. Simmons	"Baccalaureate Colleges"*** offering "Diverse Fields"**** / Located in a distant town.**

* (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions®, 2017a, para. 6)
** (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.)
*** (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions®, 2017a, para. 7)
**** (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions®, 2017a, para. 8)

In Table 1, *Master's Colleges and Universities* refers to "institutions that awarded at least 50 master's degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees during the update year" (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions®, 2017a, para. 5). Institutions are labeled as M1 (having larger programs), M2 (having medium size programs), or M3 (having smaller programs). *Baccalaureate Colleges* refers to institutions "where baccalaureate or higher degrees represent at least 50 percent of all degrees but where fewer than 50 master's degrees

or 20 doctoral degrees were awarded during the update year" (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions®, 2017a, para. 7). According to The Carnegie Classification of Institutions® (2017a) system, baccalaureate colleges might have an *Arts & Sciences Focus* or may offer *Diverse Fields* of study. In Table 1, size of locations follows the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) definitions.

<p style="text-align:center">Settings</p>

One advantage to visiting presidents face-to-face was being able to enjoy the peaceful drive to each campus and take in the beauty and pride displayed at each institution. This was especially true of the return visits in the spring and summer, when the grounds, often attended by student organizations, were vibrant and blooming with life. In spite of concerns over deferred maintenance, I thought each campus could easily be a private institution. All buildings and grounds were beautiful and well-maintained. Several had begun construction projects. Although two campuses were located in areas considered to be regional centers, all most were at least an hour and a half, if not longer, drive from an urban center and/or airport. I noticed an absence of the typical brand name businesses that surround campuses such as McDonald's, Applebee's, or Wal-Mart. Some may have had one or two restaurants close by, but not a plethora of brands like you find surrounding larger or urban campuses. Unlike their larger counterparts, there were very few, if any, businesses that served only the campus.

Drives to interview sites passed through burgeoning agriculture fields, mountains, and forests. They reminded me that many rural economies are based on their natural resources. Whether through agriculture, tourism, or mining, the areas surrounding each campus created an economic impact themselves and were very much a part of each academy. Often,

presidents discussed degrees, curricula, and student projects that enhanced the value of their region's natural environment.

Most campuses somehow enhanced their communities in significant ways. Many were located at the edge of a town, providing places for community gatherings, theater, and sporting events. In several cases, a local high school shared a sporting facility with the college campus. In order to access several campuses, I drove through historic main streets. If possible, I would stop at a local bakery or local diner to pick up a thank you treat for assistants who did so much to make my visit pleasant. Almost all campuses had some sort of historic main building, often originally a teachers' college, that was a central focal point, many dating back a hundred years or more. As much as possible, I visited the history centers on campuses to see how each institution evolved. What struck me most about each of these campuses was the existence of obvious tight-knit communities and pride of place painted by each location, well-kept grounds, and combinations of old and new buildings.

Data Collection

Data were collected through interviews with presidents. Originally, curricula vitae were to be collected and analyzed prior to each interview. However, this yielded a researcher bias. I realized I was prejudging participant responses and found myself expecting certain individuals to answer questions in certain ways. At the time, this resulted in leading follow-on questions, so the practice of collecting curricula vitae was stopped after the second interview. I found the research experience much richer driving to and visiting each campus before and after interviews than it would have been had I used Skype and curricula vitae to gather data. Interviewing participants in person in their natural settings helped me form more

complete representations of individual participants backgrounds, perceptions, and ideas than

reading resumes would have.

Seidman's (2013) interview protocol was followed. Although Seidman

recommended three interviews, in order to respect and value the time of participants, a two-

interview protocol was used. Per Seidman's (2013) recommendation, first interviews

combined exploring a participant's historical experience with details of experiences in

leadership current at the time of their interview. A second interview allowed participants to

reflect on leadership current at the time of interviews, to clarify issues that arose during their

first interview, and to explore the futures of their institutions (Seidman, 2013). Both

interviews were semi-structured and lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. A

sample of initial questions asked during the first round of interviews can be found in Table 2.

As described earlier, each president was interviewed on their campus in their office. Intimate,

on-site interviews allowed for a richer experience and understanding of the rural settings

faced by each president.

Table 2

Initial Questions Asked During First Round Interviews

First Round Questions
What attracted you to becoming the president (chancellor) of this institution?
What has surprised you most about your experience as the leader of this institution?
Please describe your greatest accomplishment at this institution.
What best prepared you for becoming the president/chancellor?
Is there something that you would like to accomplish that has not yet been achieved?

Each interview was recorded via an iPhone recording application. These recordings were digitally transferred to a professional transcriptionist who converted the recordings to text. Each transcript was assigned an identifier with the codebook for identity kept in a separate location. These recordings and transcriptions were stored in a separate documents cloud and will be kept for 3 years after study completion and will then be destroyed as is appropriate.

The first round of interviews with university presidents used semi-structured questions to build a deep understanding of their leadership context as well as determine participant backgrounds and experiences (Seidman, 2013). These interviews were carefully recorded then transcribed via computerized recording software (Roulston, 2010). Once an interview was complete, a transcriptionist prepared a written report of the responses. Each recording was assigned an identifier and sequence in order to protect the identity of the interviewee, with a separate record of the identity of the participant and an assigned code being kept in a locked cabinet in my office. The transcriptionist was instructed to remove names of principals or references to specific institutions from transcripts after transcription was complete and before transcripts were printed out.

For the second round of questions, information from the first round of questions was analyzed to develop a list of starter questions for the second round of interviews. These questions can be found in Table 3. Each interview in the second round of interviews was designed to clarify and react to the first interview each president participated in. So, each president was interviewed twice, except for one president that dropped out of the study after the first round of interviews. Second interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist, then coded using McDaniel's (2002) work as a guide and by incorporating information garnered

during the first rounds of interviews and memos taken about presidents, campuses, and communities. In totality, knowledge gained was used to explore the research question and develop a new guiding framework, a visual representation of the process university presidents described in leading these rural institutions. Throughout this entire process, memos were kept in ATLAS.ti (Version 8.4) and One Note to track progress and thoughts as concepts emerged (Saldaña, 2016).

Table 3

Questions Asked During Second Round of Interviews

Framework for Second Round Interview Questions
As a president, how much time do you think you spend planning for or considering the future?
How do you keep abreast of what you think is coming in the future? What informs your thought process?
Do you get the opportunity to participate in professional development anymore?
Do you think that the future of higher education is changing, and if so, in what ways?
You talked about the future. What do you think or do you think the competencies needed to be a president are going to change for the future?

Data Analysis

Various techniques or tools were utilized to consider and assign meaningful codes and themes to the data. In addition to coding specific lines of text, memos tracked my thoughts, emerging ideas, contexts, and concepts; data from these memos and the memos themselves were also kept in ATLAS.ti (Version 8.4) and used as part of data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Some analysis tools utilized included constant comparisons where data were constantly compared for similarities as well as in-vivo coding where participants'

words were used as a code (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These techniques were used to probe the meaning of events as well as help me recognize my own biases and test assumptions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The text from the initial interview, with open-ended questions, was uploaded to ATLAS.ti (Version 8.4) software and coded using first cycle coding methods meant to identify initial concepts (Saldaña, 2016). Once all interviews were completed, a second round of focused coding was used to identify frequent or significant initial codes and develop salient categories within the data, combining data from interviews of all nine participants. This information was used to prepare a second questionnaire more specific to each president

With both first round and second round interviews, I read each transcript in its entirety twice, highlighting areas that stood out and taking notes on my impression of the interview. I used ATLAS.ti (Version 8.4) software to begin coding general themes line-by-line. Each line of text was reviewed and assigned a code identifying the main theme. These were reviewed multiple times during the open coding process and memos were associated with emerging concepts noting thoughts about the content. Once the open coding process was complete, a more comprehensive axial coding process, noted below, was performed. Although competencies identified by McDaniel (2002), Smith (2007), Smith and Wolverton (2010), and Buller (2014) were utilized as a guiding framework for conducting this study, coding emerged outside that framework.

Additional analysis tools included using a flip-flop technique. This technique involves looking at the opposite of a word or extreme range of an emerging concept to determine significance, or by identifying a potential negative case where identified assumptions would not be true (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, many presidents

asserted they lead by influence. Using the flip-flop technique, I read the interviews to see if there were examples of presidents using coercive power to lead. If they espoused valuing input, I looked through their stories to see if they described examples of a more dictatorial style. In addition, careful attention was paid to uses of extreme terms such as "never" and "always" as these are conditions that rarely exist in reality (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Only one president tended to use these extremes and it appeared to be a style of speech rather than an expression of definitiveness.

One hundred and five initial categories of codes were identified and can be found in Appendix B. These codes were divided into themes and are described in detail in Chapter IV. Data was then analyzed and coded a second time, narrowing results and identifying central concepts and key phenomena (Creswell, 2014). Eventually, axial-coding was used to create a grounded theory describing the process leaders of these rural institutions were using to build a sustainable campus.

Keeping a record of data and an audit trail is exceedingly important (Lichtman, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). A journal of the entire research process, a book of code definitions, and a separate record of identities to assure confidentiality of participants was kept to help establish reliability and validity of the data (Creswell, 2014). All this was kept as part of the audit trail for this project (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). In addition, memos were tracked using ATLAS.ti (Version 8.4) software.

Validity and Reliability

Maxwell (2005) asserted validity is concerned with (a) ruling out threats to inaccurate data analysis, and (b) how these threats are addressed in the context of a study. Reliability,

or credibility, addresses the concern that a researcher's methods are consistent among different researchers and studies (Creswell, 2014).

In this project, validity was addressed in several ways. First, triangulation of data was used to establish accuracy and consistency in findings. Throughout the analysis period, phone calls and e-mails were made to presidents to clarify concepts and garner agreement on findings. Additionally, findings were reviewed with: (a) a Minnesota state trustee (who did not want to be identified), and (b) a Minnesota state consultant, Terrence MacTaggart, to verify validity of findings. With both individuals, I discussed my thoughts regarding emergent themes and asked advice as to whether or not the associated quotes from presidents represented my thoughts. With Dr. MacTaggart, I discussed overarching themes and compared them to research Dr. MacTaggart was doing.

Another method of assuring validity is to acknowledge and consider researcher bias (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research requires that a researcher be the main tool of data collection as well as analysis (Lichtman, 2013; Maxwell, 2005). As such, acknowledging and controlling for bias is an important part of the study (Lichtman, 2013).

As the former executive director of a research institute, I have had the privilege of being included in several conversations with academic leaders, including presidents and chancellors. As the topic of these conversations were mostly around the subject of change in higher education, I acknowledge and controlled to the best of my ability for a bias toward higher education needing radical transformation (see Appendix C). Although there is much discussion around this topic, reviewing the history of higher education reveals that there have been several points in the evolution of "the academy" where there has been a sentiment that radical change has been inevitable. No assumption should be made that change is a critical

component of future higher educational leadership. However, after conducting the

interviews in this study as well as reviewing supplemental literature on university

presidential leadership, change is a primary, if not inevitable, construct addressed both in the

literature and by the presidents interviewed.

Another technique to assure validity is time in the field (Creswell, 2014). Conducting

face-to-face on-site interviews yielded a much greater understanding of the context under

which participating leaders have performed. This was accomplished by attention to the

process recommended by Seidman (2013) and on-going iterations and interviews throughout

the time of this project (Creswell 2014). The process of analysis, originally planned for one

month, took significantly longer than expected because multiple conversations were needed

with participating presidents as well as trustees and other researchers to assure validity of the

information collected. Additionally, coding and initial categories and themes from the first

round of interviews conducted were reviewed by my academic advisor and a Minnesota State

trustee with research experience to ensure validity of findings. A notebook of progress was

maintained to improve validity.

Creswell (2014) suggested several methods to assure the reliability of a process.

First, audio recordings were constantly checked against transcripts to assure accuracy. Select

portions of transcripts were reviewed by participants for accuracy as well. Several times

words or phrases had to be updated. For example, the presidents often referred to AASCU.

The transcriptionist recorded this as "ask you" on several occasions. This information had to

be updated throughout transcripts to assure appropriate meaning was present in the data. A

codebook with associated definitions of each code was maintained. On multiple occasions,

data assigned to each code was reviewed to assure adherence to the original meaning of the

code. In a few cases, new codes were added or items transferred from one code to another to assure appropriate meaning. Once a final theory was identified, I forwarded the documentation to each president and asked them to review and comment on my conclusions as to relevance as well as accuracy of their statements. Several responded with comments, and I continued to communicate with respondents until all issues were resolved.

Summary

This study utilized qualitative research methods to explore presidential leadership at institutions in rural settings. The lived experiences of presidents who participated in this study and observations of their leadership settings were used to analyze and identify potential competencies and considerations that could be made in developing future leaders.

The research protocol involved first obtaining approval for a research project using human subjects from the University of North Dakota's institutional review board (IRB). Upon receiving approval, expert participants were selected through a snowball sampling process where participants interviewed contacted additional presidents and requested their participation in the study. Only one president declined to participate, and one president dropped out of the study after one round of interviews. Participating presidents led institutions in Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Except for one participant who was interviewed only once, subjects were each interviewed twice.

After the first round of interviews was transcribed and coded, a second, more in-depth round of interviews was conducted. These were transcribed and coded also. The complete set of data including documents, transcriptions, and coded information was analyzed and used to answer the research question.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to expand the existing body of research on leadership by closing a gap in knowledge about presidential leadership competencies that affect small, public universities of less than 7,000 headcount servicing predominantly rural areas in the Upper Midwest. As the researcher for this qualitative research project, I collected data by interviewing presidents from small, rural public colleges and universities. Insights from participating presidents turned out to be far richer than expected and went well beyond generating a list of competencies for future presidents. Participants provided insights into strategies and actions presidents take to develop long-term sustainability for their campuses. Given the depth of participants' responses, this study utilized multiple leadership theories most closely aligned with the complex and multi-faceted nature of leading a public institution in a rural or small-town environment to formulate research findings.

Two rounds of interviews with eight presidents were conducted for this study. During the progress of the study, one president dropped out, so another was added. In all, 17 formal, on-site interviews were conducted. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. After transcription, ATLAS.ti (Version 8.4) software was used to open code then axial code and analyze data. This open coding process resulted in over 105 codes and 5 associated themes. Axial coding was next used to develop a grounded theory that explains the actions and strategies participating presidents used to develop long-term sustainability of their

campuses, giving insights into what is needed for the future. This resulting grounded theory

is a model of how presidents of rural regional public universities lead on-going

transformation in higher education. This model addresses complexity involved in answering

the original research question addressing what factors current presidents of small, rural

universities in the upper Midwest feel are important to future presidential leaders.

This chapter addresses the themes and conditions of the role of college or university

president that evolved from 17 presidential interviews. Each theme that emerged from the

data taken from interviews with the nine rural presidents. Next, the grounded theory diagram

resulting from axial coding is discussed with supporting quotes and supplementary findings

from an on-going literature review. Interview information contributed by all nine presidents

was treated equally in the analysis of data.

Initial Coding

As described in Chapter III, the open-coding process resulted in 105 codes. These

codes can be found in Appendix B. These initial codes are largely representative of the

competencies identified by Elizabeth McDaniel in her 2002 work, as described in Chapter II.

Additionally, actions presidents take to lead their institutions emerged during data analysis

resulting in a grounded theory describing a leadership process.

Through use of open coding (Saldaña, 2016), interviews resulted in several groups of

data that later were further sorted to create categories of codes. Next, I reviewed the

categories and codes for those that appeared most frequently or significantly. Through the

process of analyzing the data, I continually created memos and narratives describing

emergent ideas. This process is known as focused coding (Saldaña, 2016).

Codes represent participants' leadership styles, decision-making processes, and how participants effected transformation for the future of their institutions. Each code represents a facet of leadership, the leaders' environments, or strategic actions presidents described as being critical for future presidents to understand. Participants' narratives gave insight into the depth and complexity of leadership necessary to prepare potential presidents to maintain a robust future for higher education, especially in rural locales. Some themes would be true of many presidents; however, the uniqueness of the rural, small town environment is interwoven into themes and adds a layer of complexity to the role of president.

Axial Coding Analysis

Extending analysis through a process known as axial-coding, I continued to consolidate and started to identify themes that emerged from my data ultimately resulting in a grounded theory (discussed in Chapter V). Once themes were identified, I started looking more at each theme and asking what the data said about competencies of presidents. I looked to see what kind of leadership characteristics emerged.

I started my exploration using the conceptual framework of leadership competencies originally identified by Elizabeth McDaniel (2002) in her ACE research. I added work by Smith (2007), Smith and Wolverton (2010), and Buller (2014) to McDaniel's conceptual framework to build an initial conceptual framework to guide this study on leadership competencies. However, after listening to nine university presidents, a new perspective began to evolve focusing on leadership as a process rather than focusing on specific competencies. As revealed by participating presidents, each president is unique and fits the culture and characteristics of their institution. Given specific institutional needs and opportunities, sometimes the best person for a job isn't based on competencies, but on who

fits the culture in an institution the best. As these stories built on one another, it became evident that commonalities expressed by these presidents describe a leadership process grounded in the foundation of appreciating and being active in a small, rural community setting.

What emerged through participants' stories was the importance of a leader's ability to connect, think ahead, and facilitate learning by all university constituents. While all of McDaniel's competencies were identified in some way, as were Smith's (2007), building on the context of leadership as being both rural and focused on higher education was illuminated as critical to a presidency. It became apparent that what emerged from the data was not a set of competencies or capabilities but rather a common process presidents experience in which a president constantly learns from the surrounding environment, identifies opportunities, and empowers others to enable their institution to prosper. Main themes that emerged from the data through analysis can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Main Themes

Emergent Themes from Axial-Coding
Generate Insight
Consider Culture, Context, and Values
Foster Narratives
Develop Capability in People
Create Compelling Vision
Empower
Driven by Passion for Rural, Small Town Culture

After identifying this central leadership process, I was able to construct a grounded theory describing the process in more detail. The central process identified in this study and each section of the grounded theory constructed in this study are described next. It is important to note that in some cases, when specific topics or trends were expressed by multiple presidents, commentary on these topics was added to the narrative for consideration and clarification.

Presidential Leadership Is a Process

I started out looking for specific traits or competencies outlined by presidents working in small, rural institutions at the time of this study. Rich narratives of participating presidents described a future for leadership as comprising a complex process that enables an institution to prosper. These narratives described the process and decisions presidents make in their operations rather than a set of discreet set of competencies or capabilities.

Presidents in rural environments who participated in this study described actions and characteristics they felt were important for leading their institutions. Stories represented all four of McDaniel's (2002) competency categories: process competencies, content competencies, communication competencies, and context competencies.

Two presidents identified servant leadership as their leadership style (Rupp et al., 2016). Others described attributes of a presidency and struggles they had faced. Participants strongly voiced that style matters and authoritarian leadership would fail on their campuses. President Ward described his/her entire leadership team as being servant leaders: "We're a servant management team here. Our job is to make sure the campus goes well."

Presidents were humble and hesitant to attribute specific qualities or competencies to a successful presidency, but did not lack in describing situations, decisions, and processes

they felt important for future stakeholders to consider. As Harry Peterson (2008) described

in his work on leading small colleges, leaders at these types of institutions are not positioned

at the top of their institution. Rather, they are positioned at the center, developing

relationships and a deep sense of the culture encompassing their entire university.

The process of leading a small, rural college or university is highly complex,

involving an environment of continually increasing change affected by a multitude of

stakeholders. As was revealed through the axial coding process, university presidents have a

tremendous responsibility to generate insight and envision future possibilities. They then

enable faculty, staff, and students to act upon the best potential pathway for creating a

sustainable future. The central process uncovered while analyzing data in this study was:

Presidential leadership in rural higher education institutions is a continual learning process

enabling institutions to continue to move forward in complex changing environments.

Emergent themes identified by presidents (Table 4) revealed actions presidents take

to develop the future sustainability of their campuses. Each president passionately relayed

stories that ultimately identified actions and strategies university leaders use to illuminate

opportunities and inspire faculty, staff, students, and their communities to transform in

preparation for a sustainable and vibrant future. The themes are discussed next.

Theme: Generate Insight

Henry Peterson (2008) wrote that presidents of small universities know they must

continually learn. They surround themselves with individuals most knowledgeable about the

institution and spend significant time listening, talking, and learning to gain insight. Data-

driven learning and decision making is a substantial element of university leadership (Kezar,

2014; Scott et al., 2008). In their leadership model, Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009)

identified using data to diagnose a system as the single most important, yet undervalued, skill of a leader. Presidents interviewed expressed several actions they have taken to gain insights into opportunities for their institutions. President Ward, president of a remote college, outlined not only strategic planning, but conducting community needs assessments and taking action:

> We just came off of a 15-6-month strategic planning process. And we were very intentional about pulling internal and external data. And, by the way, I've been able to hire some young vice presidents who are so data driven, and it really helps because they're saying, "Well, let's look. Let's look. Let's not make this assumption." And I think that's critical when looking to the future. So, our meetings over the next few months now will be maybe bringing an outside facilitator in to do kind of a needs analysis and gather information from members of the community, members of the college, and then start identifying – now we could probably sit down and say we know it's going to be housing, we know it's going to be this, this and this, but we'll let that come out of the conversation.

President Ward's description highlights the increasing importance of data-driven decision making. Modern higher education strategic planning goes beyond a tradition approach to include assessments and taking decisive action (Martinez & Wolverton, 2009).

President Morgan, leader of a rural Master's level university, discussed the importance of analyzing data by garnering insight from institutional research and institutional effectiveness positions. Once data is gathered, a cabinet analyzes the information together, which is considered integral to a planning process. All presidents expressed the importance

of gathering real-time data, discussing what the information implies, and making decisions about the potential direction of their institution.

Faculty and Staff Input

Along with analyzing trends within their cabinets, presidents expressed how important it was to gain input from faculty and staff. Elizabeth McDaniel (2002) asserted shared governance has been a critical component of leadership context competencies. Most presidents described how they honored shared governance. President Parker explained that shared governance can become a complicated process as differing disciplines and departments prioritize and react in different ways.

> I did my dissertation on faculty participation in decision making. . . . The effect on their satisfaction and morale. I looked at disciplinary differences. There is actually a whole typology of disciplinary differences. . . . Yeah, but there's a whole level of paradigm development as they say. So the hard sciences, the soft sciences, which one fits in what areas and then how, these are my words, how their acculturation affects them.

The complexity of leadership is revealed by President Parker's explanation. Presidential leaders consider daily how different faculty and staff, experts in their own right, react differently to situations. Due to the depth of expertise of most faculty, President Parker feels differences in colleagues can become more pronounced in an educational environment than in typical business environments.

Presidents, in describing faculty, inherently demonstrated the importance of faculty input on the future of their institutions. President Morgan described the commitment of faculty:

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I think you really have to think about what your common interests are between your

administration and your faculty, and ultimately the faculty are very much interested in

ensuring that their students are successful. I mean, we're a – we're a teaching

institution, so that's really a high focus for us. . . . And I think also, the faculty are

looking at what is going to strengthen the institution and what are some areas of

growth that can help to strengthen it.

Acknowledging the different worldviews of various disciplines on a campus

highlights the complexity of navigating leadership around a campus. Then,

presidents add various departments and functions such as student recruitment,

finance, and facilities maintenance. All presidents interviewed, as with President

Morgan, acknowledged the complexity yet the importance of finding common

interests and ultimately a common vision for their institutions. They articulated that it

is important to consider the differences yet build on commonalities. Most often, one

commonality is teachers' commitment to providing the best student experience

possible.

Community Needs and Perspectives

Rural universities, more than their urban counterparts, play a critical role in the

economic and social vitality of their surrounding communities (Charles, 2016; Leist, 2007).

Because these institutions mostly enjoy less bureaucracy, they can often be more personal

and customize their partnerships to better meet community needs (Manning, Campbell, &

Triplett, 2004). Not only do presidents actively engage in community activities, they also

provide leadership and foresight into economic trends and social opportunities that most

benefit their small towns and rural areas affected by their campus. Presidents take external

input seriously and work diligently to inspire creativity and leadership in addressing

opportunities. President Ward explained:

> So, the title of this one [this strategic plan] is Engaging the Future, and it now gives a
> more systematic approach to some of the best practices in Higher Ed. It continues to
> reward and emphasize outreach on campus and in southeast [name of region], and
> then it's going to have very specific things. . . . We've got a group with the city that's
> going to work with the city to develop it. . . . So, our first meetings over the next few
> months now will be maybe bringing an outside facilitator in to do kind of a needs
> analysis and gather information from members of the community, members of the
> college, and then start identifying [needed action].

An understanding of community and how a university can help bridge the void

between new knowledge with the needs of a rural environment, according to Dr. Ward,

creates ownership for change by the community, and by faculty, staff, and students as well.

President Simmons' leadership developed a significant program to gain insights and benefit

the region served by his/her university:

> We'd go out and meet with the manufacturing companies, and you start finding out
> about the fact that, well, in the most part we didn't do a significantly good job of
> interfacing, of utilizing the knowledge that we create at the university, to help in
> economic development. . . . We were kind of acting as consultants, going out to
> community – we had community developments with sociologists. . . . We had ag and
> bio-systems, engineers. We would just bring in whatever expertise we needed from
> the university to help this individual or group and from there started going after grants
> and contracts, and I literally just started this – we just kind of really based it on need

and kind of grounding on the philosophical thing of what a university should be and –

and how they should be a tool to help the region. And from there it grew.

President Simmons' experiences bring to light the importance of understanding a

community and the social needs of an institution. Presidents reported they also engage in

understanding the businesses and industries impacted by their institutions. All presidents

acknowledged various methods of learning about their constituencies' needs and perspectives

from facilitating input to conducting research in areas of opportunity to sharing in building

projects as initiatives to garner insights and meet the needs of the community were

successful.

Alumni Relations

Throughout the interviews, it became readily apparent that students have been the

central focus of presidents. These students, if successful, become alumni. Presidents

identify alumni as stakeholders important to consult who are helpful in identifying future

opportunities for a campus. President Ward shared how he/she based future initiatives on

alumni input:

I've had all kinds of feedback from students, faculty, staff, and alumni. And the

themes that came out of that – what are we most proud of at [name of institution]?

Then, I kept hearing repeated during this last year by alums who are coming back,

graduated in the '60s and '70s. It was the personal connection that they had to a

faculty member, and how a faculty member helped them find something they didn't

expect in their life, and how they changed their life.

Not only does input matter to new initiatives, in addition, many presidents

interviewed discussed the increasing importance of alumni donations. Several articulated

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that as public universities, often alumni are not acclimated to donating as they believe the legislature is funding operations. This trend is changing rapidly and most of the presidents have begun funding-raising initiatives targeted at alumni. Presidents expressed that they have been becoming more and more like private institutions, including the shape of their relations with alumni.

Trends Analysis

Presidents often reminded me that the role of a campus is far more than reacting to student, alumni, and community needs. University leaders develop many initiatives that provide foresight and challenge to faculty, staff, and students. They also ensure that faculty are developing forward looking programming to meet student expectations as well as inspiring actions on campus that anticipate community opportunities (Manning, Campbell, & Triplett, 2004). Many presidents reported using various publications such as the Chronicle of Higher Education as well as other reports such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to examine trends and look to the future. They also described multiple initiatives for industry engagement to keep an eye on upcoming trends and opportunities. Some of the trends expressed include societal need for lifelong learning, increased public scrutiny and decreased investment by the government.

Networks and Associations

In addition to reviewing data, presidents build networks with others to build knowledge and remain current. The presidents interviewed were all excellent listeners and described greatly enjoying input from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members. However, as noted earlier, they also reported being keenly aware that they were

expected to look to the future and lead when opportunity presented itself (MacTaggart, 2017; Lustig, 2015). President Stewart discussed the importance of keeping a large network:

What that did was open my eyes to a larger than just a simple institutional perspective, so I have lots – a big network, and I pay attention. I am engaged sort of nationally in a lot of things. I think that's helpful. . . . It is less about being insular and more about scanning environments. I don't know if that's a skill, but it is a disposition, I guess.

As did President Stewart, most presidents expressed the importance of maintaining outside networks to keep abreast of trends and future opportunities. Many, as did President Stewart, actively participated in national organizations in order to network and gain insight. Additionally, they specifically noted the importance of Harvard training for university leadership and the American Association of State Colleges and University annual presidents' convention as critical to staying abreast of trends and networking with other presidents from institutions similar to theirs across the nation.

Theme: Consider Culture, Context, and Values

Edgar Schein (2010) is famous for his research on how culture will undermine strategy if not effectively understood. His work asserts the importance of a leader carefully considering culture when examining an organization. Further, influential organizations such as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the American Council on Education (ACE), include cultural and content knowledge as critical aspects of presidential leadership (Eddy, 2010; McDaniel, 2002). Eddy (2010) linked this cultural competency to aligning organizational strategies with existing, working frameworks and honoring the history of an institution.

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David Charles (2016), in researching the intersection of rural universities and their surrounding communities, identified the context of rural locations as being important to designing strategy for an institution. His research indicates understanding rural economic development is critical, and he asserted that rural regions have a unique context that must be understood when designing initiatives. President Parker set understanding culture as a goal. "I need to constantly better understand the culture." And President Stewart acknowledged others as helping:

> I know that I'm not the smartest person in the room, and I have this incredible team of people who many of whom have long years of experience here, so they can help me frame the [university] culture, which is a pretty interesting and unique culture.

Interestingly, many presidents talked about internal university culture as well as external community culture, especially in a rural context. They repeatedly articulated the need for experience in small, rural communities in order to lead effectively. Due to the smallness and cohesiveness of rural communities and the relatively large footprint of a university, rural culture intertwines and affects the culture of faculty and staff and vice versa. This is a unique dynamic expressed as not as likely in larger communities or larger institutions (Peterson, 2008).

Student Centered

Student focus was perhaps the most espoused value of every president interviewed. Many shared they give a significant amount of thought to both present and future students. Presidents considered how to move campus culture to be increasingly mindful of students needs and expectations. President Ward considered culture and actions:

We hadn't aligned our resources to just focus on students. . . . We created ways

faculty could find something they could do towards that plan that made sense to them.

They could figure ways to be more engaging in the classroom. They could think of

ways to bring people from the outside or take their classes somewhere, and we started

a student engagement enhancement fund.

Understanding students' needs by leaders, faculty, and staff was evident in all

interviews. Leaders often outlined the importance that information on student needs is

shared with faculty and staff to generate common goals and enhance the student experience.

President Ward also reshaped his/her campus culture to be more responsive to student needs:

When I first got here, we closed down one time for snow issues – we closed the

campus. Walks weren't cleared; students could hardly get out of their residence halls.

It was like we'd forgotten there were students here. So, that's the other part of this is

where we're trying to refocus on what's the student experience. So, every decision in

a cabinet meeting or budget related issue – how does this impact the students?

President Ward's comments highlight the impression left by all nine presidents.

Making decisions in consideration of improving the student experience is of paramount

importance on campuses. President Coleman also related student-centered thinking to

planning:

You've got to have a true genuine interest in students and their welfare. I won't say

that we ask this every time, but we have to somewhere in most discussions. We have

to stop and ask ourselves how's this going to affect students and our own

constituents. But, "how does this affect students" is the main thing that we're here

for.

As President Ward did, President Coleman reinforced the notion that leadership, faculty, and staff incorporate a "student first" focus in decision-making on campuses. President Jenkins related the continual focus on students, both traditional and non-traditional, in considering the future:

> We keep track of that all the time. We just think it's just like when we went to school, but now they talk a lot about Generation Z students and who are they. Who really are the nontraditional students that we can serve? What are transfer students, and where do they come from? What is the next graduate student like? And so I think – thinking into the future of what's coming to us next and how we can better serve them with something that we can even spend enough time with.

All presidents interviewed were steadfast in supporting the needs of current and future students, whether traditional or non-traditional. They outlined this as the primary mission of their institution. Many articulated how their choice of a small, rural campus was due to their ability to interact more with students, including having personal influence on their future. Most were committed to creating a personal experience for students on their campus. Two specific topics were expressed most often by presidents: enrollment and the sustainability of a residential campus.

Higher Education Context

Some public sentiment holds that effective presidents do not need to have experience in higher education prior to becoming a university president. However, most presidents, especially given the student focus of rural regional universities, voiced the importance of having specific knowledge in higher education. In describing their daily actions and concerns, university leaders revealed knowledge about content and processes that are unique

to higher education. President Jenkins voiced sympathy for those without knowledge of higher education:

> I feel sorry for people who really come up from the total business community and have never – don't know anything about Higher Ed and start to be President. It's that whole faculty environment, the work environment, that's so different than anything else you'll ever find.

The work environment is clearly important and most presidents felt maintaining a positive and encouraging environment by understanding the uniqueness of their institutions was important as well as the higher education context. A higher education context requires a president have a keen understanding of the expected collegiality of shared governance, where faculty have influence over academics and the president is responsible for the well-being of a campus in general (Rowley & Sherman, 2001). Black (2015) asserted that a president must have an understanding of the context of higher education and make decisions with that context in mind. Presidents interviewed shared this sentiment and described multiple situations requiring an understanding and consideration of the context of higher education.

In addition, President Morgan expressed how important it would be for a president to understand an institution's accrediting agency and associated standards.

> Another area that is always affecting and important for us to pay attention to, would be our accrediting agency. And for us, it's the Higher Learning Commission is our accrediting agency . . . accreditation is your license to operate – and an affirmation of the quality of an institution so students will know that when they select your institution by your accreditation, you are a valid institution of higher education.

Most presidents expressed how understanding the higher education process such as accreditation as well as navigating the shared governance structure are important considerations for a successful presidency. They felt that prior experience and knowledge in these areas was critical. Additionally, due to their small rural environment, president respondents expressed working with students and actively participating in increasing enrollment as more pronounced at their institutions than at larger more urban institutions.

The context of higher education requires a broad spectrum of capabilities in administrators. Elizabeth McDaniel (2002), in her ACE study on senior academic leadership capabilities, identified several critical capabilities needed specifically in leaders of higher education. These included knowledge of academic administration, technology advancements, student affairs, fund-raising, athletics, finances, budgeting, and legal issues and trends. Each of these was mentioned in some way by the nine presidents interviewed. Mentioned most often was knowledge of serving students and academic affairs. Understanding and promoting enrollment was a close second when coding data. These two were strongly tied to the third and fourth most mentioned prior knowledge concerns: higher education finances, budgeting, and fundraising. In some fashion, every president captured these as critical knowledges for an incoming president. The depth and breadth of discussions regarding understanding of the context of higher education left little doubt that among presidents interviewed, context and knowledge specific to higher education is vital.

Another topic discussed by participating presidents was a growing understanding of legal concerns institutions face. Although all respondents participated in a higher education system with access to legal counsel, leaders felt experience in this area is important to decision-making. Presidents assess risk to their organizations, which can mean they need to

understand both finance and legal matters concerning higher education. President Parker asserted:

> You have to look at the domain of what would be the risk if we do this or what would be the risk if we do that, so I think it's reputational. It's the integrity of the institution. It's legal, and it's financial.

Another university leader (President Jenkins) expressed how legal issues specific to higher education have become so complicated that many leaders now have law degrees:

> A lot of JDs are presidents now, which is interesting to me. I think what a law degree teaches you is amazing. I mean, it's so much more broad than people think. I think the law is going to play . . . We talked about that earlier when we talked about funding models and so forth, and that's the problem. All these new policies that, then, just feed the lawyers – Title IX, the ADA. It's just constant. Now the new something, where the European Union has said that we cannot host their students unless we have compliance with their European – something. And now all the lawyers are on how they're going [to] make us compliant. . . . It's constant.

Whether possessing a Juris Doctor (JD; law) degree, business degree, or gaining experience through prior positions, understanding an institution through an enterprise lens as well as through academic programming is important to leadership of small, rural institutions in this study. The paradigm of rising to a presidency through academic accomplishment to become first among equals is fading to the importance of experience in leading an educational institution as a business and financial enterprise in addition to an academic enterprise.

Although there continues to be a public debate on whether or not a university president should come from the ranks of academia or business and industry, presidents in this study were clear. In order to run institutions like the ones in this study, understanding and formulating decisions around the context of higher education is imperative.

Institutional Culture and Values

University leaders in this study spent significant time thinking about culture and values specific to their institutions. They had assessed their culture and made decisions based on their assessments in many different ways. President Morgan used a survey to monitor and build the culture of his/her campus:

> I'm really constantly thinking about ways that we can influence the culture in a positive way. So, I mean building the environment, I think, that is very inclusive, is a critical piece. This summer, we'll be looking at a climate survey that we conducted with our faculty and staff and then also looking at some strategies to help improve the campus climate as well.

President Morgan described the culture and history as giving a foundation to build on. "And it's just been the culture of this institution that I think has carried on. And there's a sense of pride with that, in the relationships that faculty and students develop." President Bailey talked about using campus-wide appreciation of the sustainability of his/her institution as an important advantage:

> I'd like to think it has – this is going to be an odd way to describe this – our emphasis on sustainability. Now it's easy for me to say our students are graduating and our faculty are doing well. We have more undergraduate research opportunities, more

money, etc. But there's a culture on this campus and a connectedness to this campus

to the [campus location].

Some of the presidents encountered a need to change the culture at their institutions. President Jenkins described the difficult culture that existed at the beginning of his/her presidency:

You know the culture at [name of institution] is a very much old paradigm. I arrived

with a faculty believing heart and soul that they ran the institution. Heart and soul

that they ran the institution, and that our jobs were to do what they said. It was a

very strong group of faculty. There wasn't a majority, but very outspoken; they even

bullied their colleagues.

Although small, rural institutions share similar characteristics, each campus in this study was unique. All presidents interviewed expressed this directly. As will be discussed later, most presidents asserted that the uniqueness of their campus was being used to identify a specific niche or competitive advantage for students attending their institution. Understanding the culture specific to each institute appears to be a vital element of planning for the future.

System Expectations

Although the general public often perceives a president/chancellor is the head of a university and perhaps operates with ultimate authority, all presidents interviewed participated in some sort of statewide system where they reported to a higher authority in a systems office. This means presidents need to understand how to lead their institutions but also how to navigate and garner resources and directions from system leaders. President Stewart revealed an increased coordination among system institutions:

There's been, since I have been here, talk about system mindedness, and there is now

a framework for this system. There is some effort to try to be systemic in our

thinking. Some of that is succeeding more than other things. . . . So, it is interesting

being here because in some ways we are an autonomous campus and in some other

ways we are entirely not.

The same leader relayed a benefit of the system:

One of nice things about being part of the system is I have, you know, there are three

other colleagues, and so we in fact just had a conversation today. So monthly, we

have a phone conversation, and then we see each other at the region's meetings, and

they're a good source of information.

Understanding the nuances of being part of a larger system, including when

institutions compete and when they collaborate, was expressed by many. President Ward

described how he/she lacked understanding of working in a system and its importance in

leading an institution:

I hadn't worked in a state system, and I didn't understand all those relationships –

who I needed to keep informed, and when I needed to consult, and when I didn't. So,

without going into details, I'd say, well, I made some pretty good mistakes there.

And have had to go back, and I'm very intentional now about, you know, I just call

the Chancellor every Friday and say, "Hey, I don't have anything but just want to stay

up to speed. Do you have anything?" I want to make sure that if there's anything out

there, we're talking about it, and that's something I didn't do – well, didn't

understand, when I came in.

Whether participating presidents worked in a system of all 4-year colleges and universities, or whether they were part of a larger, multi-type system, all expressed the importance of understanding the differences between varying types of institutions. As all operate in a rural, regional environment, they expressed especially understanding the nuances of 4-year institutions, community colleges, and technical schools. There exists great opportunity for different type institutions to collaborate but also concerns over competition for students as well as meeting community expectations. President Parker talked about competition, how collaboration was needed and what happens when being part of a system:

> Well, I think it's interesting that you talk about collaboration and competition, and I think that's really interesting because, yup, we compete for the same students, but we should also be collaborating. Certainly, I think the real question is what does it mean to be a system? What is an optimal system [here] at this point in time?

Participation in a system is perhaps unique to public institutions. This complexity makes leading, especially in a small, rural environment, challenging at times. In some states, the allocation of funds from the system office is predominantly based on economies-of-scale, favoring larger institutions. This dynamic can create disadvantages for small institutions. In other cases, association with a larger, well-reputed campus can create recruiting advantages. Most presidents conveyed that understanding benefits and challenges of participating in a system was important for leaders to experience prior to becoming a president.

Theme: Foster Narratives

In his research on small university presidents, Harry Peterson (2008) pressed the importance of a search committee for a new president understanding stories and narratives that faculty, staff, students, and alumni tell about their institution. These stories create a saga

of an institution that exemplifies campus culture and helps define what "forces" (pressures) create successful working relationships. A president creates narratives that build upon this saga in order to help individuals make sense of the future direction their institution is heading in as well as see themselves as being part of needed culture.

Honor History and Traditions

In her work on examining and moving strategic foresight into action, Patricia Lustig (2015) outlined the necessity of a leader helping others make sense of data. Further, she posited the importance of creating narratives about tradition and history of an organization. Narratives put new data into context to enable sensemaking (Ratcliffe & Ratcliffe, 2015). Many presidents acknowledged the powerful force of history and traditions at their institutions. President Ward demonstrated this as a basic component of campus communication:

> So, I was also very careful not to label what I didn't think was working in any public
> setting, but to talk about what was good and to build on the traditions and the history
> of the institution because those mattered.

> Like President Ward, most presidents expressed the importance of appreciating the

richness of "the academic tradition", understanding the richness of the evolution of higher education, as well as honoring the specific history of their institution. Having this grounded understanding of their institutions has allowed participating presidents to devise multiple methods for helping affected stakeholders make sense of information and take action.

Enable Sensemaking

According to Brown, Colville, and Pye (2015), organizational accomplishment is directly associated with how well sensemaking occurs within an institution. Brown et al.

asserted that sensemaking enables such organizational processes as change, learning, innovation, and creativity. Interestingly, one of the most common words found among interview transcripts was the word sense. This was most often used in light of making sense of something or making a decision because it "makes sense." Although presidents did not specifically articulate sensemaking as a process or activity, it was evident in all of their interviews. President Stewart described gaining a common understanding of potential and actual challenges across campus before strategic planning:

They [the leadership team] are going to go out and do it [interview and assess needs] with groups of people from across campus. And then their job will be to come back and make sense of all of this stuff that they've learned.

Like President Stewart, most presidents expressed the importance of putting data in context and assuring it was understood by decision makers as a routine part of their planning processes. In another use of sense, President Bailey described the need to have a strong sense of self in order to effectively lead:

So having a good sense of critical thinking, a good sense of your moral turpitude and where you believe your ethics and your abilities to balance those things lie, I think have to remain consistently in check. They're not challenged that often, but you do have to ask oneself what are you willing to do for certain things and in what manner are you willing to do them.

Whether it is helping others to make sense of data or understanding oneself, the importance of first understanding then enabling others to make sense of information proliferated in transcripts of all presidents. It was apparent that presidents in this study spent

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a significant amount of time considering, then devising, ways to consistently increase the common understanding of all stakeholders.

Tell the Story

Patricia Lustig (2015) defined storytelling as a way to enable leaders to tie together a memory of the past with an expectation for the future in the "present" for a specific day. Presidents of small universities exercise care in learning the history, assessing the environment, and designing methods of sensemaking for their institutions. This often occurs through stories or sagas. In his research on effective rural community college presidents, Leist (2007) defined, "telling the story" as a critical capability of successful leaders. Listening to and then retelling a story is especially important in rural environments where citizens may not have lived or worked elsewhere and can possess a narrower world view. Effectively communicating through "telling the story" can allow presidents to talk with community stakeholders about their views as well as relay success stories in which their institution held a key role. Presidents identified storytelling as a key component in fundraising (either through legislative action or from private sources). Failing to establish a story and communicate well can have negative effects, as President Jenkins asserted:

> And then the last one is, what's happening in the political environment, which is so fast paced right now. And I don't see it getting better. I don't think funding for education's going to change significantly. I think it's going to get worse before it gets better. I think a lot of that is our own fault for not messaging appropriately. So what does that mean for us, and how do we need to start building relationships to create a different message about what we do as institutions of higher learning? . . . I

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would tell you, and this has been an "Ah hah" moment for me, and we've done a horrible job of telling our story.

Communication with stakeholders, including creating a positive narrative about the success of an institution was described by many of the presidents as crucial. Creating a story that incorporates the complexity of the institution into a simplified narrative understandable by constituents was important to most. President Bailey also alluded to the importance of effective narratives in connecting with a community, especially changing a narrative to fit an audience:

But I think when I'm in front of groups – the Foundation, the Alumni, some of our faculty, some of our students – being a good marketing salesman, sharing information in such a manner that works for the community that you happen to be a part in.

Whether it is communicating internally or building a message for external stakeholders, presidents interviewed demonstrated a significant amount of time is spent devising communication, including storytelling, to bring life to their visions. Telling the story requires clear, transparent communication both internally and externally. Presidents described clear and transparent communication as being vital to a successful presidency. President Simmons voiced the importance of communication decisions every day:

I think the greatest accomplishment is transparency – just saying to folks, "It is what it is." And so this is what it is. These are our trend lines. I share a lot about budgets. I never hide budgets. People understand where the money is and where the money's going, and I also have tried to give people input. I think for your first year, it's the wisest thing. I think, as a president, the first year is "ask a lot of questions."

As described, clear communication affects all areas of the university. Other presidents also commented on the importance of their communication style in everything from writing speeches to having open channels of communication with faculty and staff. President Stewart talked about the importance of tailoring leadership style to fit a community:

> I have to write my own speeches. I certainly get to write a lot. But I think when I'm in front of groups – the Foundation, the Alumni, some of our faculty, some of our students – being a good marketing salesman, sharing information in such a manner that works for the community that you happen to be a part in.

President Stewart's comments not only convey the importance of clear communication, but also the complexity and depth of the various constituents. A president must convey knowledge as well as "sell" the public on making donations or attending the institution. Each message is tailored for a specific audience.

Theme: Develop Capability in People

Once leaders develop an understanding of their presidential role(s) through insights, they put these understandings into an appropriate context given the culture of their environment, and start to communicate in a way that builds trust and inspires people. Leaders must develop capability in people so those people can adapt and transform their institution (Kezar, 2014; Fullan & Scott, 2009). In their research on leaders of educational institutions, Scott et al. (2008) defined a capability as a level of talent or capacity necessary to create desired outcomes in complex and continuously changing environments. Further, Scott et al. identified the ability to develop capability among faculty, staff, and students as a critical role of higher education leadership. Presidents interviewed in this study also

identified the importance of developing capabilities within individuals in their institutions, but also actions they take in the process.

Additionally, pressure for transformation in academies has been vetted almost daily. Most presidents relayed concern yet excitement about the future, and envisioned a hopeful future and embraced strategies to enable creativity and change to occur campus-wide. President Bailey relayed the sentiment of most well. "And so yes, I get to do a really cool job during the day that transforms individuals into amazing things through their lifetime."

Developing capability in faculty, staff, and students to recognize and embrace new skills and abilities that will allow them to adapt requires significant emotional intelligence. With great agility, presidents must help faculty, staff, and students make sense of potential opportunities and challenges then enable them to act to seize an opportunity or eliminate a challenge. Presidents stressed the importance of handling conflict and enabling others to do the same. They enable creativity and innovation while also building skills to manage the tension and conflict that accompanies transformation (MacTaggart, 2017; White & Eckel, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Enable Innovation and Change

According to researchers, a prominent area to strengthen in college presidencies is the ability to lead higher education through an accelerating pace of change predicted to characterize the future. Emerging leaders will need to readily identify forces of change and innovate beyond the traditional duties expected of a president. Many agree creating a change capable institution will be vital (Aspen Institute, 2017; MacTaggart, 2017; Scott et al., 2008).

Leaders are often early adaptors of change (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). In addition, small campuses can be at an advantage in a changing world compared to large campuses

because they are nimbler – can change more quickly – than their larger counterparts (Peterson, 2008). On the other hand, rural institutions can be slower to accept outside leadership; and even though they are capable of changing more quickly than larger institutions, they resist change (Leist, 2007; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). The pace and unpredictability of change will likely continue to accelerate (Ratcliffe & Ratcliffe, 2015). Building capacity and allowing others to participate in building a future is a vital element of presidential leadership (MacTaggart, 2017, Norris, 2018). President Barnes shared the importance of developing capability to change within an institution:

> But one of the changes, obviously, is managing change. I kind of like that process, but 30 years ago everyone was residential. We worried about our campus. Now we're everywhere. There's online, a whole new world for faculty and staff, and the students themselves. So that whole change process and managing that is going to be difficult, particularly in the eyes of the public. . . . It intensifies in the future. The rate of change in society is going crazy, a lot of it fueled by technology, and technology is changing society. We serve society, therefore, we can't stick our head in the sand like an ostrich and hope it passes by.

Preparing faculty, staff, the public, and even students for transformations necessary in higher education is a major factor in leading a university (Kezar, 2018). As the pace of change continues to increase, developing a campus' ability to change will likely be a critical success factor in the future of that campus. Many presidents described needed change in terms of innovation. President Simmons described innovation at a university:

> But to be innovative and creative, I think sometimes it takes a lot of ideas, and that's when they look – when you actually study innovative networks, you start seeing that

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innovative networks actually get smarter because each one is building upon each other. So, it's not just one synapse that's going to work, but if you get an innovative network, you have hundreds and hundreds of synapses going on simultaneously. And, because of that, the network then challenges itself – the network of people; the network of ideas.

As described, many presidents expounded on the notion that change and innovation are intertwined and that care needs to be taken by a leader to sustain and advance a change-capable and innovative environment. President Morgan acknowledged pressure from the chair of his/her board as well as optimism about moving forward on innovation:

Yes. It's definitely an interest on the Chair of the Board's part. He really likes to be thinking about, what do we do differently, and how do we think more innovatively. And so, I'm interested in being a part of that dialogue and helping to shape what that looks like. I think it's going to be a good discussion.

Pressures for transforming or changing higher education are abundant., including pressures from governing boards and legislative bodies. Participating presidents reported significant pressures to transform their institutions for future sustainability, especially to address financial concerns. Externally, the environment surrounding higher education has been changing at an increasing rate. Presidents clearly outlined that this pressure is as true for small, rural institutions, where change is often slower, as it is for larger institutions. Some argued that these pressures have more impact on small, rural institutions than their counterparts in more urban areas. Specific areas of change and innovation identified by multiple presidents include: the pace and complexity of change is increasing, student

demographics, enrollment and expectations are changing, and technology development

increases stakeholder expectations as well as budget needs.

Foster Learning Communities

Encouraging innovation and change, and enabling a community to build on this, is a

critical responsibility of university presidents (Peterson, 2008). One strategy is to build

"learning organizations" (Senge, 2014). Bolman and Gallos (2011) asserted that thinking

and learning are the most important aspects of academic leadership. President Stewart

described the creation of a learning community on campus as an element of strategic

planning:

> We did a big project where we read articles about the current state and future state of
>
> affairs and then talked about them. Because that's the other thing about institutions
>
> and faculty, especially faculty who have ever only been at one institution, is they kind
>
> of think that's the way it is everywhere. Or they think they're so rarefied and
>
> different that nobody else can understand them. It's that sort of level setting and sort
>
> of helping people to understand that other places are struggling with these same
>
> issues, so it's not just people picking on us. So that's why I did this exercise of – this
>
> reading and discussion exercise. . . . I really had to think about a way to break the
>
> faculty out of their sort of prison. . . . So, we spent last semester reading and having
>
> conversations about the environment in higher education as a context to begin a
>
> strategic planning process.

President Coleman has utilized steering committees to create understanding and

action. Essentially, these are learning communities:

We've worked really hard to create some steering committees that are cross sections

of campus. . . . I call them steering committees, but you know they have different

titles, but they're collections of folks who have proximity to issues and the resources

and the ideas and the workflow to make things change and happen in campus. We

take those groups, and we task them with real issues and problems that we have and

expect them to formulate responses and come forward with solutions. . . . They're

very much expected to function as a team and an action group.

When faculty and staff convene as steering committees, they are learning about a particular

subject and incorporating strategies to be taken into action. President Jenkins intended to use

learning groups to foster community relationships:

So actually, we're going to put together a study group in the next 2 months and start

moving in that direction. So that's something that I started to think about 2 years ago

and started to move toward it and just new collaborations with the community. . . .

So, I think it's something – so, for me, I just recently – actually, the last 2 years, I've

been thinking about how we can build a better relationship with our community and

specifically look at facility needs.

Create Confidence and Motivate Faculty

In order to develop capability in people and enable transformation at an institution,

presidents often motivate faculty, staff, and students and instill confidence in their people

that they can accomplish their vision. As can happen, especially in rural environments where

funding has been scarce and there may even have been discussion of closing a campus,

presidents must be cognizant of inspiring confidence in and motivating faculty (Leist, 2007;

Eddy, 2012). President Ward explained:

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We didn't really believe in ourselves. . . . The institution came close to closing in the

90s, and they let the campus run down– I even heard alumni say this, "Good enough

for [name of institution]. So, I needed to change that perception, and you know, that

takes time. . . . And so, we started highlighting the fact that we were providing these

great academic opportunities, and then any time we'd have a student get a national

award, and we've had a lot of them, but we just highlight those student successes.

President Barnes, head of a rural baccalaureate college, also acknowledged campus

closure concerns and talked about building trust and motivation and enjoying watching the

success:

Well, for example, when I started, the campus had basically collapsed. We were in

closure mode, and we were millions of dollars in debt, and everyone was scared, and

there wasn't really anything right. . . . It's just the human aspects behind all those

changes, getting people to stop thinking of us as a campus in trouble but one they

need to support instead. . . . You got to build into it. And over time, if you're

consistent and you really feel that way, people will start believing you. And they'll

buy in, and I think that's happened. So, I've never wavered from that belief. . . . It's

fun to watch people who are motivated. It's just a hoot. . . . They come running up

saying they did this or "I got the grant," or something happened. I say, "Well good

for you," and I try to give lots of credit to everybody else, be humble.

Manage Tension and Conflict

For most presidents interviewed, creating confidence and motivating faculty was a

bright spot in their position. However, some presidents highlighted the importance of

effectively handling tension or conflict, especially when governance issues would arise with

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faculty. Leading an institution structured to require input from multiple constituencies can slow important initiatives and create tension. President Coleman explained:

> There are still some faculty who were here pretty early on – who have been here at 50 years. . . . So in 1960, it was pretty innovative, and the governance model that evolved from that was very egalitarian and flat and programs, really innovative. But we're now 50 years in and so a lot of what we do hasn't changed that much. It's no longer necessarily fresh and new and different than what a gazillion other small liberal arts colleges are doing. . . . I don't know if this is true everywhere is that on one hand faculty and staff want to be led. But on the other hand, they don't want you [to] tell them what they ought to be doing or what direction we ought to move in. So it's really hard to navigate.

Managing tension and conflict can be difficult and emotionally draining. Because presidents are driven by a passion for their mission and see it as their responsibility to bring hope and inspiration to others, they maintain the emotional levity to manage conflict and move their institutions forward.

Theme: Create Compelling Vision

Perhaps one of the greatest characteristics found in all presidents interviewed was an obvious passion for their missions and the people they have led. President Parker characterized a rural university president, "It's a calling for me." President Stewart elaborated:

> Right, so the mission of the institution is important. It's valuable. I believe in it, so it's now my mission to make sure that that mission survives and to think about what

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needs to happen here to make sure this is a viable place, right? Not just viable, but

also strong and thriving.

With this passion for their mission, presidents interviewed described the importance

of creating a compelling vision. They also expressed the importance that this vision is shared

by all individuals on campus.

Develop a Unique Value Proposition

A unique value proposition is derived from an organization's passion. An effective

proposition identifies potential customers, what services or products are being offered, and

how what is being offered distinguishes an organization from other choices (Patton, 2017).

With so much public scrutiny, increased global competition, and reduced public investments,

rural university presidents constantly consider the value their university brings to students

and stakeholders (DeMillo, 2011, Kezar, 2014; MacTaggart, 2017). Presidents will need to

identify how their schools are special or different from other higher education institutions

and how their schools contribute to their community because in rural settings, they cannot

create economies of scale (Charles, 2016; Rupp et al., 2016). In order to survive in rural

areas, where resources are scare and regional student enrollment potential may be dwindling,

presidents often find themselves identifying the strengths of their institutions and articulating

how they fill a particular niche. That was a key focus of presidents interviewed. Presidents

needed to identify what is unique about their schools and enable their institutions to fill a

niche and strengthen their unique value proposition across campus (MacTaggart, 2017).

President Jenkins shared:

Just how many of us survive this, I think, will be the question. How many do you

really need to serve the population? So, as residential campuses, there's that little

niche, and life is good. But you've got to have a very unique program like we have.

President Jenkins expressed the sentiment of many of the leaders interviewed by

acknowledging that some campuses might close if they do not innovate and create a unique

choice for incoming students. President Simmons elaborated on creating a niche and spoke

in terms of the higher education market:

And so from a business strategist perspective, we need to determine what part of that

marketplace that we're going to play in. . . . And I always say in marketing, there's

three ways you can do things. One is cheaper than, which in this institution we won't

be – and, I'm not sure we want to be, because we have a quality that we have to

always adhere to, "better than," which in some areas maybe we can be, and then

"different than." And so, for us, in this kind of a regional university, we have to

figure out the "different than." What do we do differently than everybody else?

What are we known for? . . . And I started to develop and notice a niche that wasn't

being met.

Identifying unmet needs is one strategy some presidents, like President Simmons,

articulated, identifying the unmet needs of potential students and then fortifying or

developing programs that differentiate an institution from others pursuing the same path.

President Ward described taking alumni and other stakeholder input and creating a niche

based on insights:

I've had all kinds of feedback from students, faculty, staff, and alumni. And the

themes that came out of that – what are we most proud of at [name of institution]?

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Then, I kept hearing repeated during this last year by alums who are coming back, graduated in the '60s and '70s, and it was the personal connection that they had to a faculty member, and – or how a faculty member helped them find something they didn't expect in their life and how they changed their lives. So, for our alums, it was the personal connections that helped them realize something about themselves they hadn't realized. And so as we looked to the future, we saw that same thing, that our niche as a smaller school is to get our faculty and our students and our staff connected to students in ways that help them maybe realize their potential in ways they hadn't thought about.

Perspectives on creating a niche go beyond internal faculty and staff to include other stakeholders such as alumni. These alumni can often give great insights into future trends that might affect an institution. Whether it was described as considering the market, increasing enrollment of a particular type of student, or gaining insights from campus stakeholders, most presidents asserted the importance of analyzing the assets of their campus and creating a signature program or niche in order to achieve future sustainability.

Build Strong Relationships

Enabling a shared vision and value position, moving a campus forward, and keeping a future focus requires presidents to build strong relationships both internally and externally. As described previously, presidents interviewed expressed a tremendous amount of emotional intelligence. They readily coupled emotional intelligence skills with building relationships that keep forward momentum going (Ratcliffe & Ratcliffe, 2015; Rupp et al., 2016). Failure to engage a campus and build relationships can have a detrimental effect on the success of a presidency and an institution (Kezar et al., 2006).

President Parker described a string of capabilities important to effective leaders, especially in rural areas:

Must have **place** skills. Must connect – not be officious and inaccessible. They want to be respected, and you must be "normal." Don't talk a lot and don't draw attention to yourself. Relate and connect . . . you must have high EQ [emotional quotient]. There is a real value for EQ in smaller place. . . . Build everything together and build partnerships. . . . Skills. I do. I think you really have to know how to connect with people here. . . . I think some skills you need are you have to be able to relate to people. You have to be able to make those connections.

President Morgan also considered relationship building a key aspect of being presidential:

Really, the relationship development is the key point for the president in developing very strong relationships and being able to ensure that people have confidence in my leadership and in the institution and the direction that it's going, so that they're more likely, when it comes to their philanthropy, that they're more likely to give.

All presidents interviewed identified the importance of building both internal and external relationships. In many cases, they used their personal time, family, and even their homes to build critical associations. President Ward hosted close to 2,000 people a year with family:

I think [name of spouse] says we host close to 2,000 people a year in our home. . . . So, we have a lot of people and about 800 of those are students. . . . So, we have a lot of student groups in, and then we'll host alumni gatherings. We'll have holiday events where we invite people in. I'm always inviting people to come use our house

so, you know, the garden club has come up. So, you'd have to have a spouse who

finds energy in that and wants to do that or it wouldn't work.

It should be no surprise the rural university presidents interviewed, with their

tendency to have closer access to all on campus, greatly value their association with their

students (Charles, 2016). President Parker described working with a student senate:

Yeah, and I'm very involved on campus, especially with students. I mean a lot of

students know me. I mean in the last day, I've gotten three people who, one gave me

the flowers, one gave me candy; two others gave me thank you notes. I mean it's

like, just out of the blue and because they came to say thank you – one of them the

flowers. She wasn't even graduating. She just wanted to thank me for my support. I

know a lot of students. At student senate last week, I went to the meeting, and I

realized, whoa, of the 20 some people there, I knew every one of them but one. I

didn't even realize that some of these people were on the senate. I just knew them.

Like President Parker, almost all presidents interviewed acknowledged a sense of

fulfillment when they interact, with students especially. These strong relationships were

personal and gave the presidents a sense of pride and accomplishment. Whether spending

time with internal stakeholders such as faculty, staff, and students, or building external

relationships with alumni, community members, and funders, the presidents in this study

spent a significant amount of time and energy building relationships. They expressed that

while internal stakeholders are important on all campuses, due to the rural influence,

understanding and integrating a campus with a community is of particular importance in rural

areas.

President Ward was not only surprised by the importance of their institution to the region, but required administrators to live within 25 miles of campus so they could become integrated into the community surrounding the campus:

And the one thing I didn't understand coming out of private Higher Ed up to the same level was how important this college is . . . . We're really the lifeblood of [name of region], symbolically, but we're also the second largest employer in the five county region. . . . Well, you know, maybe I hadn't expected what great support we had from the [this] region, how much we mattered. Of my last vice-president hires, I tell them they have to live within 25 minutes of campus . . . . And so, we work hard. We're strengthening economies together as a national program. . . . And then once we are relevant to the region then we have more political clout. So, it sounds mercenary. That wasn't the intent, but then when people are talking up at legislature about funding, we matter to this part of the state.

From a rural remote baccalaureate institution, President Ward's comments highlighted the importance of community relationships to a rural university. Many presidents outlined how community partnerships have been vital to the mission of their institutions. Several critical community partnerships were under way when President Jenkins arrived:

When I first came [here], the school district had some initiatives underway involving the performing arts and their athletic facilities, and they ended up not going to the vote of the people. . . . There was a lot going on, but ever since then, I've been working collaboratively with our community to come up with some thoughts on how

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we could work together on a performing arts facility and an indoor swimming pool and some options to help the high school solve their athletic problems.

President Jenkins', with experience leading a medium master's college in a rural area, remarks show the unique ways rural universities partner with and serve the needs of their communities. These partnerships go well beyond teaching students to addressing issues of surrounding communities. Building relationships with a wide variety of people from students to community members was mentioned by all presidents interviewed. They echoed the importance of social skills and of relationship building, and especially being empathetic to student needs and public expectations. Most presidents interviewed highlighted the importance of collaboration in building relationships and decision-making. When President Parker was asked to name one of the most important factors of leading, he replied, "Build everything together and build partnerships."

Although this seems like a simple statement, inclusivity, partnership building, and empathy were among the most mentioned capacities participants suggested presidents needed. Presidents affirmed many strategies for building trust and relationships including having an open-door policy, conducting and acting upon surveys, promoting roundtable discussions, and simply walking around campus. They also reinforced that, especially in rural environments, a campus leader must be openly active in their community, express empathy with others, and demonstrate taking action on concerns brought forward by their constituency.

Several participants relayed stories about having to plan extra time to "shop for conversations" or having to change into casual clothing before attending local events. Most reinforced the importance of collaboration and acting on input from stakeholders (students,

faculty, staff, parents, community members, etc.) as critical to garnering support both internally and externally. This was especially true during times of crisis such as budget crunches, cuts in funding, or student conduct issues on and off campus. Transparent communication, collaboration, and empathy were mentioned the most as important in navigating critical decisions such as budget cuts and laying off faculty and staff.

President participants expressed how important it is understand the influence and power a president holds. Because of their position, participants expressed respect towards other individuals as being highly important. President Parker, in discussing community relations at a Master's college, expressed the importance of showing respect to external businesses as well as students:

Start with respect – businesses know I respect them. . . . This other colleague and I were talking about this one colleague of ours. Goodness, he insulted a student in a meeting. We were both there thinking, "Oh, no, no." . . . He didn't even realize he was insulting people . . . maybe we don't have the innate intelligence that other one had, analytical intelligence or whatever, but we've got higher EQ [emotional quotient].

Emotional quotient is another way of saying emotional intelligence. Showing respect for others and their opinion was espoused by many. Additionally, President Barnes and his/her cabinet used emotional intelligence to improve service on his/her campus after a period of poor morale:

The morale was not good. Finger pointing, negative people, we just got everybody together. Said, "This is going to stop," and we came up with a good name. We call it a consumer orientation approach. It means everybody who comes to campus, lives on

campus, works on campus, associated with the campus in any way, shape, or fashion gets treated with respect. . . . People started treating each other decently. If they didn't, then we have to remind them of what this campus stands for.

Presidents felt the importance of strong relationships and emotional intelligence in leading their institutions is important to morale of faculty and staff. Poor morale can quickly affect the student experience as well as operations. Often, the presidents expressed morale concerns at the beginning of their tenure. Many presidents narrated stories of building respect on their campuses when they were first beginning their positions. President Simmons worked on building a culture of appreciation and respect among everyone on campus:

So, I'm just trying to work on appreciating what people do. A couple weeks, I'm having all of the grounds people to my house for dinner, which I'm going to fix for them. . . . It's like, "Okay, I appreciate what you do." So if we continually show that yes, we do respect you, and I know you're the ones that are here at 3:00 in the morning. Thank you . . . some of that's just a very slow cultural change. There's no magic sauce on that, but if leadership emulates it, it has to go up, and it has to go down. And so that everybody feels that they're valued in what they do.

A fundamental outcome of relationship building and respecting others is building trust among all campus constituencies. Most presidents expressed "building trust" as a building block for planning and transformation on campus.

Trust is important in any organization or community. It allows individuals to feel comfortable and assume intentions are sound. This was asserted as especially true in a rural environment. Presidents expressed the importance of building trust, but also felt that building trust can be more difficult for a president coming from outside a rural community.

President Coleman, heading a Master's college in a rural area, discussed the importance of people trusting you enough to bring forward problems or concerns.

> If every time somebody brings you a problem, they get burned for it, they're not going to come to you with problems, and you're not going to know what's going on and be able to fix it. So that's just, that's the way I've chosen to operate throughout my career. It's been a pretty successful model for me. I have to be able to trust people. You have to, and all that is built on trust. . . . That's just, it's part of the role of being in a small community, but that's good because it means people feel comfortable to come to me. I want them to feel that way. If there's something that's on their mind, I need to know what it is.

Leaders must trust others in order to receive trust themselves. Trust must go both ways. President Barnes intimated it is difficult to come into a rural community and build trust. "Small campuses like stability and long-term people. I think it's safe to say that. They often prefer to have someone from within instead of without. They don't trust people from far away."

Many of the presidents relayed that building relationships, trust, and communication networks can be more difficult in rural environments. However, given that relationships are vital to support and success, incoming presidents might want to give careful consideration to establishing trustworthiness. Part of building trust includes a president modeling the behavior the president needs everyone else to adopt on campus

Shared Governance

Inherent in higher education and emphasized by many of the presidents in this study, is the concept of shared governance in operating an educational institution. Faculty are in

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charge of academics and administration assures a campus runs efficiently and effectively.

Most importantly, all major decisions and plans involve everyone on campus. President

Stewart described their shared governance committee:

> Is made up of constituents from across campus and [name of institution] governances
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> [are] really interesting and unusual and involves everybody on campus. . . . And at
>
> the time . . . [name of institution] was founded, it was a pretty innovative place you
>
> know. So in 1960, it was pretty innovative, and the governance model that evolved
>
> from that was very egalitarian and flat and programs [were] really innovative. But
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> we're now 50 years in and so a lot of what we do hasn't changed that much right?
>
> And so it's no longer necessarily fresh and new and different than what a gazillion
>
> other small liberal arts colleges are doing.

As with President Stewart, many presidents considered shared governance a blessing

and a curse. On one hand, having so many experts available to weigh in on a plan or

direction can assure excellence. However, the process can become cumbersome and slow.

As with President Stewart, many reported the need to balance consultation with decisive

action, especially in the case of change.

Three presidents, in conjunction with working in a shared governance system,

mentioned differences inherent in working with individuals from different disciplines. For

example, one president noted that his/her engineering and business departments readily

embraced change while his/her humanities departments tended to be resistant and defensive.

This could be an area needing further exploration and is beyond the scope of this study.

Presidents also outlined a changing professoriate. Given budget cuts and changing

needs for various new types of faculty, the number of tenured faculty was decreasing at the

time of this study and the use of adjuncts increasing. Presidents were balancing financial

demands with the importance of delivering a quality education to students.

President Ward, from a rural baccalaureate college, outlined considerations their

institution had been making to create an optimal learning environment:

> We do have a high number of adjuncts, probably the highest percentage is in our
>
> online and our graduate programs. . . . Adjuncts have a really important role. . . . It
>
> seems like that would fit best for junior- and senior-level courses, where you bring in
>
> somebody who has a kind of unique experience. . . . We think it's not good to have a
>
> lot of adjuncts at the freshman and sophomore level, because that's where you build
>
> your connections.

President Ward's comments highlighted well the considerations often made when

addressing personnel planning. Care is taken to assure the best student experience possible.

President Barnes elaborated on the future of the professoriate, a critical consideration for a

sustainable campus:

> I think there are sneak previews here and there of more 1-year contracts and almost a
>
> temporary approach. There are some campuses that don't give tenure anymore. . . .
>
> The public doesn't understand things like tenure, life-long, you know, employment.
>
> And they don't like it, a lot of them. So that's going to continue. If we don't change
>
> fast enough in Higher Ed, and we don't become more efficient, those kinds of things
>
> will have to be reconsidered.

Presidents intimated that the increased use of adjunct professors coupled with the

diminished use of tenure creates challenges as professors move to protect the employment

conditions they expect when entering higher education. This creates challenges in

orchestrating the case for transformation in higher education. Many presidents expressed spending a significant amount of time considering how to incent change under these conditions.

Future Orientation

Within the context of shared governance, building strong relationships, and creating a unique value proposition, presidents have spent a significant amount of their time focusing on the future potential of their institutions (Kezar, 2018; MacTaggart, 2017). Whether they are articulating a unique value proposition, building shared vision, or visiting with stakeholders, focusing on the future was important to presidents interviewed in this study. Although they expressed varying timeframes, all readily shared significant parts of their responsibilities to lead their campus communities into developing a successful and sustainable future. President Stewart focused on 10 years into the future: "And we are building some . . . an exercise so this semester is what we are doing is focusing on creating the vison of the [name of school] 10 years from now."

After building a shared vision of his/her campus for 10 years into the future, President Stewart intended to have a leadership team reverse engineer the vision and design a present strategy to achieve the vision. President Ward also included focusing on future advance strategic planning efforts:

So, the title of this one is *Engaging the Future . . . .* And that's kind of the trick. And I don't know where we need to go, but you know, everybody goes to their professional meetings. They read the paper, the newspapers, and they watch the news. The clues are all there, just if you can get people to go on that journey.

President Morgan shared thinking about students 20 – 30 years into the future:

But in reality, I need to be thinking even longer term than that. I need to be thinking

beyond my presidency, beyond the next 20 or 30 years even, and looking how we can

grow our endowment so that those scholarships are there for students, generations

ahead.

As discussed earlier, presidents used many tactics to first generate insight, then they

would develop a process to weave elements together and consider the future. President

Parker revealed:

I always think, where will we want it to be in 3 years; where will we want it to be in 5

years. Even though we deal a lot in the immediate, most of us are looking out –

further out. I think that's what we have to do. I don't know that any, well, nobody

has a crystal ball, of course, and we can't totally predict what things will be. But I

think before we start anything or even continue anything, we have to look a couple

years out in terms of looking at something's viability and something's sustainability.

We as presidents are responsible for the future of our institutions. We can't just look

at the past, and we certainly can't just deal in the immediate. We have to look at what

we need to do to make the institution stronger.

Presidents in this study readily discussed the process of building a shared vision,

crafting a strategy for opportunities, and developing capacity in people to build a sustainable

and successful campus. A critical component of their leadership has been to empower

faculty, staff, and students by allocating resources, building a strong team, and empowering

them to act.

Theme: Empower

Mentioned as frequently as working with students, presidents in this study expressed the importance of building an outstanding leadership team and empowering them to take action. Respondents also pressed the importance of continually challenging their team with well-designed and thoughtful questions.

One key process mentioned by many for empowering and transforming faculty, staff, and students was appreciative inquiry. In their book describing the use of appreciative inquiry (AI) in higher education, Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2012) defined AI as a process grounded in the concept that every organization has something that causes it to perform well. Leaders then use this assumption (appreciate) to create compelling questions and design narratives (inquiry) that allow others to make sense of an issue and take action. Using a process like appreciative inquiry in the context of shared governance moves stories and vision and empowers faculty, staff, and students to move forward.

Marshall Resources

Presidents spent significant time garnering and allocating resources. These resources can be funding, facilities, or even people. A president approves the number of faculty lines in each department. Much has already been outlined such as fundraising. However, the process presidents take to raise and allocate resources can be considered by some as enterprise management. A significant, and increasing, part of marshalling resources includes considering finances and fund-raising. Every president outlined situations where they needed to keenly understand cash flows, budgets, and finances as well as fund-raising. President Barnes indicated the importance of prior knowledge of finance when dealing with a large budget cut:

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But I have to understand cash flow. I have to understand budgets. I need to

understand downturns in economies. I mean a lot of people, they spend a bunch of

money, and you could tell there's going to be a correction in the economy. Well, if

you over spend, it hurts you; otherwise, if you can read the economics or whatever

and say let's hold off for a year, then it happens, and you have don't have to recover.

One thing we did when our last budget cut, we had a 20 percent budget cut a couple

years ago. We boiled it down to essentially, "What can you expect in revenue per

student, and therefore, how many students you need." We set up campaigns and

marketing techniques and the whole shebang to try and make that happen, and we

pulled it off.

Many presidents discussed controlling facility expenses as well as deferring

maintenance. In fact, many said one of the biggest surprises they had when they became

president was deferred maintenance and capital expenses had not been adequately addressed

in previous roles where they served or while they were in training. President Barnes

described a critical cost saving presidential project:

We brought in engineers. Our big problem was our fuel bill went from about $80,000

a year to $600,000/$700,000 a year. We didn't get an increase in appropriations. So,

it was bankrupting us. The solution was the newer, the modern, clean coal plant

instead of oil. So that plant, $6.6 million, is paying for itself in 15 years, and plus we

have a positive cash flow.

President Barnes' comments highlight how marshalling resources is not just about

raising funds. Additionally, a president deals with more than just an operating budget. Not

all situations involve cutting budgets. President Coleman voiced the importance of understanding financial information when building on campus:

> We've completed about 30 million dollars' worth of construction since I've been here. . . . We're in the process of renovating some of our athletic facilities. We just started on that . . . . There's it's a combination of funding from the state from the college and from private sources. . . . Well the, you know, I think I've got a fair amount of financial acumen.

President Coleman's comments build on how complex the financial pictures can be for presidents. President Jenkins elaborated on several key reasons that finances are important to understand and shared the advice that future presidents take time to learn about finances:

> I think it's understanding finances. You can't just let your CFO do it. That will be a disaster. And I've met presidents that did that – and that was bad. And the minute you do that, your CFO's running your institution.

President Jenkin's comments highlight why presidents need financial acumen. If they don't, then the CFO (chief financial officer) might likely be the person running the institution because that position will understand the strengths and weaknesses of the finances and will make their own decisions based upon that knowledge.

In addition to finances and fund-raising, all presidents in this study led public institutions, giving rise to concerns over state and federal allocations. None were immune from shrinking budget allocations from state legislatures. President Morgan, leading a rural master's university, expanded on the role of a president as being knowledgeable yet neutral:

You're always neutral from a political standpoint in that you're not taking any party

affiliation, but it's important for advocacy when it comes to what is in the best

interests of higher education as a whole and for your institution for you to be able to

take a stance . . . and so, it's a pretty important piece of the role that you need to

constantly be keeping abreast of what's happening out there and seeing whether or

not there's some influence that can be made . . . and so staying on top of that and then

looking for opportunities where you need to be an advocate, either for or against

some of the policy changes that are coming out from your federal government or your

state – state government, is a pretty critical piece of the position.

Being politically savvy and keeping an eye on what was happening on the legislative

front was important to the presidents of these rural institutions. Concerns expressed ranged

from legislative mandates, such as freezing tuition, to watching the allocation for their

institution. In some cases, presidents reporting having to carefully navigate the suggestion of

campus closures. In addition to monitoring a situation, some presidents articulated that their

campuses either had been or could be considered for closure. They felt their small size and

rural location made them particularly vulnerable, and required respondents to have a balance

of business knowledge, a familiarity with the value of rural communities, and a deep

appreciation for the process and culture of higher education. Most expressed needing this

knowledge to identify opportunities and create a niche or specialization for their campus'

sustainability.

A university presidency is a complex position, requiring multiple skills and

capabilities. In addition to strong leadership and communication, presidents interviewed

expressed the importance of having a balance of knowledge between understanding their

institutions as business enterprises that raise revenue and control expenses and still honor the realm of academics. Most presidents voiced a sentiment that having enterprise management skills is of critical importance to small, rural institutions where presidents may hold greater responsibility for day-to-day operations than their urban counterparts.

Enterprise Management

Elizabeth McDaniel (2002) described content competencies as understanding administrative functions such as finance, budgeting, and academic administration. Higher education is not a business, however, failure to understand an educational institution as an academic "enterprise" and failure to have knowledge of business practices can cause a presidency to fail (Trachtenberg et al., 2013). If business operations, such as managing budgets and raising revenue, fail, academic quality can diminish eventually to the point of unsustainability (MacTaggart, 2017). According to Rupp et al. (2016) at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, understanding enterprise leadership is a critical capability public university presidents need to master. Similar to McDaniel's (2002) content competencies, many presidents asserted the importance of balancing enterprise management with the context of higher education in leading an institution. Many also expressed exposure to the enterprise of higher education as important to leading. President Barnes attributed his/her success to having a business-related PhD:

> But unfortunately, we didn't have academic problems on campus; they're business-related – budgets, money, all those types of things. . . . I think my business background – I taught business classes – I think maybe perhaps for me at least it was a little bit more pragmatic vision. I did, but I certainly have seen a lot of situations where the strict academician has trouble with that because that's their world. . . .

That's not the president's world. Well, for example, when I started, the campus had

basically collapsed. We were in closure mode, and we were millions of dollars in

debt, and everyone was scared, and there wasn't really anything right. But through

the MBA program and through a doctoral program in business, you study, here's a

business doing well and here's a business totally collapsed. . . . Well, we recovered

very quickly, and we went from a million dollars in the hole on the campus side, half

a million in athletics in the hole to almost a million in the foundation side. . . . In 4

years, we pretty much had all our debt done.

Although President Jenkins had not worked in business, the experience of running

student affairs, including enrollment, managing budgets and community affairs, gave this

president exposure to the business-related functions of his/her institution:

I think where student affairs skill sets play when you come through my track, not the

old dean of students track, is large budget management. You know a lot of your

academic folks haven't managed a budget. When you have all the auxiliaries, 4,000

students lives . . . in this day and age you better know how to manage budget, or

you'll go under quick. . . . So my undergraduate degree is in business administration

with a second major in communication and a minor in economics. . . . The business

background is huge, and I know higher ed doesn't like to talk about it, but it's true.

We are a business.

Managing an academic enterprise requires understanding current and potential

revenue streams while also considering efficiency and effectiveness of operations. Many

presidents interviewed acknowledged public support was not likely to change and new

methods of raising revenue would be critical to sustainability of their institutions. President

Jenkins questioned the future, "How do we start thinking creatively about how we change our funding models to survive what I think will be a major change in the way we're funded?" President Parker advised future presidents: "Learn about fundraising. You need to know how to do that. You absolutely need to know how to connect with people." President Coleman stated:

> I think find somebody that is very competent in the fund-raising world and spend time with them to understand how that process works, because it's a process. It's a very specific process. Those efforts are very super critical. I won't say scripted, but they are. You have to be able to be comfortable in that role.

President Coleman's comments tie the importance of fundraising to enterprise management and ties this management back to the importance of strong relationship skills. President Morgan also identified fundraising as a priority and sought professional development:

> So, one of the things that I looked at is – you always think about, okay, where are some of your gaps in your own professional growth? And, for me, a stronger individual when it comes to fund raising was a growth idea that I identified. And I just got back last week from a conference that Case put on. It's called *Inspiring the Gifts – the Largest Gifts of a Lifetime*. And so really understanding the development world is something that I said, "Okay, I need to understand more of this. It's not my everyday job, but I need to understand what my role needs to be in these particular types of discussions.

As public funding continues to dwindle for public institutions, developing or honing skills in fund-raising was a priority mentioned by most presidents. They also raised issues

regarding other revenue streams. Weisbrod, Ballou, and Asch (2008), researched university

missions and raising money, and identified academic capitalism as activities such as seeking

grants, patents, creating industry partnerships, and establishing endowments, especially in

public institutions. Most presidents interviewed were keenly aware of these topics. When

faced with an extreme budget crisis, President Barnes engaged in several such activities:

> We try to be more self-sufficient. We made changes in our foundation office. we
>
> hired a professional fund-raiser and changed all that because we raised maybe a
>
> couple hundred thousand dollars a year. Three years ago we raised a million. Two
>
> years ago two million, last year three million. . . . We tried to make a good stride in
>
> grant writing so this past year we raised 24.1 percent of our total revenue – all the
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> money we spend from grants. . . . Well we got three and a half million just to do
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> early childhood, head start that whole area because there's a child care shortage in the
>
> state. We write grants in education to a variety of things. We wrote a grant to help us
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> initiate a new nursing program. It just, we've had grants to do research in agriculture,
>
> and we got a patent coming out now to make plastic out of wheat.

Seeking grant opportunities to achieve initiatives has been increasing in popularity

among those interviewed. President Morgan prioritized finding a grant writer and working

campus-wide to identify opportunities:

> We tried to hire a position, a grant writer position, and we weren't successful in our
>
> first time around. So we're rethinking the position and will be posting that again . . .
>
> and in my past institution, we had a grants office, and I mean, they worked with
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> faculty, they worked with staff, they worked on institution-level grants. And I see a
>
> great value in that. So that's something, again, we've set aside the money for.

Actively seeking funding from multiple resources was a need expressed by all presidents. Most often, they identified this in terms of business language with terms such as revenues and expenses. In addition to revenue generation, several of the presidents mentioned cost containment and budget planning. The cost of deferred maintenance, or money associated with properly maintaining buildings and facilities that was not being expended due to budget struggles, was a major surprise to most presidents interviewed when they first accepted their presidency. President Barnes detailed reversing the severity of deferred maintenance costs when taking over leadership of a campus:

> Another thing we've done with this campus. Twelve years ago we had a 40 percent deferred maintenance rate. Forty percent of this campus was shot. It was horrible. The next worse one was 20 percent, and that was a bad campus. Now, I say this year, we're probably about five, six percent deferred maintenance. . . . We built a new coal plant. We did a cost-benefit analysis because our heating bill went up from 80,000 a year because of the price of oil at the time to 740,000 a year. So, one of the study groups brought in engineers to say what can we do to lower our energy costs? And the solution was the newer, the modern, clean coal plant instead of oil. So that plant, $6.6 million, is paying for itself in 15 years, and plus we have a positive cash flow.

In addition to maintaining facilities, many presidents interviewed described the importance of understanding aspects of capital improvement projects on campus. President Coleman detailed significant experience:

> We've completed about 30 million dollars' worth of construction since I've been here. Some of it is projects that we started on my watch. Some of it is completing projects that have been in the hopper for a long time. We're in the process of

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renovating some of our athletic facilities. We just started on that. . . . You know, I've

been involved in building buildings and renovating old buildings to housing

operations on campuses as well as in places like downtown.

President Jenkins was proud of capital improvements, in partnership with the

community, on campus:

We successfully funded a 15.2 million-dollar center for applied technology that's

coming out of the ground as we speak. That done, that came to fruition my second

year. Got the city to give us a million dollars in support of that facility which was

unheard of in this community, but we got it done. We got that going; we renovated

our high-rise and got that off the ground. . . . But in any event, we're expected to

have, I think, in lots of respects the latest and greatest of everything because that's

what students expect.

A campus needs funding, buildings, and resources to thrive and meet student

expectations. So, administrators plan for effective and efficient use of these resources. This

is especially true in the public arena where scrutiny continues to build.

Enterprise experience, whether through a formal degree or experience on campus

handling budgets, revenues, and expenditures was discussed by most presidents. Literature

described a debate over the path to a presidency as being between a traditional academic

pathway and an emerging business background or pathway. No matter what the path,

business competencies were expressed as important (Black, 2015; Freeman & Kochan, 2013;

MacTaggart, 2017).

Planning

Empowering and enabling faculty and staff to perform needed actions are important elements of a vibrant campus. However, as outlined earlier, in order for a campus to effectively transform, stakeholders need to make sense of information and formulate plans for action. Planning creates a blueprint for taking action. It outlines expectations, sets priorities, and establishes goals that enable faculty and staff to engage and act cohesively (Kaplan & Norton, 2008). President Barnes conveyed the importance of planning to carry an institution into the future and illuminated critical efforts stemming from their planning process when in financial crisis:

> I brought the cabinet together. We locked ourselves in a room for 1 week. I said, "At the end of the week, Friday at 4:00, we emerge with a plan to carry this institution into the future. This plan will be the PR basis for talking about legislators and state board members and everybody else." It became known as the eight-point plan. We stuck to the eight-point plan, and we made progress every year, significant progress.

President Stewart described the importance of creating a planning process that had not been in place for almost a decade. This process included creating a learning community:

> We had not had a strategic planning process since 2007, so we've launched a strategic planning process. . . . I'm kind of envisioning and planning because I really think it has to be – My whole big thing is higher education has to get out of its own way because it is an environment that is different than when all these people were undergraduates or graduate students. So, now this year there is a system-wide strategic planning process going forward that is putting together actual plans that would drive budget decisions for the system. . . . And then some goals that are

aligned with that, and then in the fall, probably, we will build out what that means in

terms of actually the strategies and the tactics we will use. So, this is the big picture –

exciting thinking. . . . Yes, strategic planning is one of my favorite things.

While acknowledging a future focus, President Ward illuminated several tactics used

in the process of creating a plan for everyone on campus to follow. This process started by

generating insight through data:

I think the base of that strategic planning process, as we looked to the future, really

was considering what the data's saying. . . . And so we did a pretty thorough – we

did the needs analysis, and we called it the SOAR exercise. . . . I've had all kinds of

feedback from students, faculty, staff, and alumni. And the themes that came out of

that – what are we most proud of [at name of institution]? . . . . So that's what the

synergy I'm seeing, and maybe that – what we've been doing in the past was good,

but now we realize you can also arrange resources to encourage those kinds of

personal engagements. . . . So we had the broad strategic planning effort, and then we

broke into subcommittees this last semester and developed kind of a more focused

implementation plan, and now we'll be working with that. We've developed a

stronger assessment and KPIs [key performance indicators] for this strategic plan than

the last one.

Take on New Initiatives

Many presidents discussed the importance of encouraging faculty and staff to take on

new initiatives. President Parker described the success of a new initiative and the cycle of

continuing to identify new ones:

I talk about the importance of taking on new initiatives . . . . We started with, I think, we started with seven courses, 35 students, and it grew into an operation with 300 some courses and over 9,000 enrollment, so in the space of about 6 or 7 years. It, you know, but a lot of things have changed since then. Technology's changed. People found they were comfortable with things. Now maybe there's a level of competition in the market place. I think, but I think that it probably prepared the faculty at the institution to be ready for the next wave. There's always a next wave. There's, always there will be. I'll probably, I may not see it before my tenure's over, but there will undoubtedly be another wave, another innovation, that will drive significant change for higher education and the rest of the world.

Presidents felt technology will continue to have a dramatic impact on campuses. With a focus on student impact and learning, one of the initiatives presidents identified with the most was the use of technology in education and the importance of integrating coming advancements campus-wide. Having been a former Chief Information Officer, President Coleman acknowledged the importance of keeping pace with change to empower campus operations:

I think that technology permeates every aspect of our operations. Very few parts of our operation are not impacted by technology, I mean everything, so how that's going to impact the teaching and learning process, operations process, what we do relative to compliance, have to do for compliance, and you know the technology brings its own compliance with it. We've talked about things like student information systems and our financial systems and things that have sensitive data on it about people or finances and things like that. So, the credit card process, all of those things that we

have to meet certain compliance codes to be able to do. So that's kind of in the present in a way, but we have to be looking down the road to see what – how that's going to change.

Keeping informed was on the mind of most presidents as they considered how to fund and incorporate advances into their institutions. At the time of this study, the potential impacts of artificial intelligence were already affecting presidential planning. President Parker illuminated:

> How that environment's going to change, how that's going to impact what we do, I think artificial intelligence is probably going to have a huge impact on the process of teaching and learning. I don't happen to subscribe to the school of thought that that's going to do away with the need for faculty and our teaching staff. I think they'll be impacted not probably unlike the things that we've seen happen in terms of the on-line area and the development of educated development of delivery of education over the Internet. That's had the application of that technology, to teaching and learning, has had a huge impact on our classroom instruction, the things that can, the elements that can be incorporated in instruction in classroom.

President Parker pointed out the importance of new technology as it relates to learning outcomes. Technology will likely continue to improve learning as was also described by President Ward:

> How do you improve learning? Not how do you implement technology. It will slowly change, but the students coming into college now have already changed in regards to technology and stuff and accept a lot of things, do things differently than we did. That's why part of the reason I got to move – I got to step aside. We all have

our time and our era. But I was the technology guy. I was the Chief Information

Officer. I wired this campus and set up the processes and procedures for this whole

digital age here, so I get that part, but I'm so out of touch in a year or two . . . .

Forever. Proliferation of technology will never end, I don't think. It's just a matter

of how fast it goes.

Technology has been important to campuses; however, the presidents in this study

felt people are still the most critical resource. An important element of the people is creating

and empowering a great leadership team.

Assemble Great Leadership Team

Although presidents spent a significant amount of time building relationships, as

outlined earlier, they were keenly aware of the importance of creating value. This value was

created through action. All presidents in this study acknowledged collaboration and

teamwork as critical to success. For example, President Morgan elaborated:

I mean, you're always looking at ways that you can influence but also recognizing

that you don't have all the answers. And it's really a team environment, and seeking

input from different perspectives that allows you to help move forward in the most

positive of directions. I certainly don't have all the answers.

President Jenkins acknowledged that a president does not move a campus forward;

rather, an administrative team acts together:

Well, I think that – the first thing I would say that I – that to move faculty forward,

it's not going happen in the president's office. It's going happen with the VP – and

the deans. So if you don't have a good structure in place, and you have not hired a

good Vice President for Academic Affairs or Programs, whatever you call them, and

you don't have them surrounded with deans that want to be innovative, it's never

going happen. Because it's got – those are the folks that are interacting with your

faculty all the time, not you. So, first of all you have to have a good team, and then

you have to empower that team and be open.

President Bailey also considered enabling a leadership and then knowing when to stay

out as critical to a presidency:

Another way to put that is we saw an opportunity, and part of being a president at a

regional campus is getting out of the way and recognizing that not everything has to

go through the president at every level. It's letting those who have a passion for

something; running with them. Just staying abreast of them or guiding them a certain

way that we know might amplify what we're trying to do. And that's what exactly has

happened. When it came to this. It was recognizing there was more passion in some

outstanding individuals who had very strong skill sets in those areas, and then letting

them do it and getting out of the way; and then supporting them however we could.

Most presidents echoed these sentiments in some way. They also acknowledged that

empowerment, action, and responsibility don't just lie with a leadership team. President

Simmons discussed empowerment and expected performance from everyone on campus:

Everybody takes responsibility for whatever your job is, and is assumed to try to do

that to the highest level you can. If you see ways to do it better, talk to your

supervisor, or just do it if it doesn't require somebody to oversee that. And part of

that is when you have self-respect, and self-respect comes from assuming a leadership

role. . . . Everybody's a leader in their space, and everybody should be. So again,

that's a cultural thing that you start in by really challenging people to be the best at

what they do. . . . I don't know that much about manufacturing, but what I do know

is about putting the right people in the position, hiring the people, giving them really

high expectations of what you want them to do, and then get out of the way and let

them be in their space.

Whether it be students, faculty, staff, or alumni and donors, interviewees in this study

made it plain that people are the foundation of a thriving campus. Being located in a small

town, rural environment gives character to educational institutions and enables these

campuses to thrive.

Theme: Driven by Passion for Rural, Small Town Culture

Presidents of small, rural universities face issues and lead their campuses in ways

similar to their counterparts at other more urban types of institutions (Eddy, 2012; Soares,

Gagliardi, Wilkinson, & Hughes, 2018). However, they also face a unique set of

circumstances. Each institution in this study was built on a foundation of thriving in a rich,

yet unique, rural environment.

Researchers have noted that the rural context under which rural presidents lead is

often overlooked (Eddy, 2012; Leist, 2007; Stoecker, Holton, & Ganzert, 2017). The

richness of rural culture as well as the passion and commitment these presidents have for

their rural regions became evident during each on-site interview. Culture and context,

identified as contextual intelligence by Pamela Eddy (2012), is foundational to the process of

presidential leadership according to presidents interviewed. It was impossible to categorize

and describe the depth and richness of culture of the small, rural, and public institutions

visited. When planning or making decisions, considering the impact on culture and

constituents was integral to all decisions these presidents made or are likely to make in the

future. There is little question that a rural environment and small-town culture is embraced and cherished by the presidents interviewed in this study. Building on the value of a rural campus, President Coleman noted:

>   You know, it's a business. It's an industry. It's a, you know, a health care institution. It's, there's something about that location and that community that helps it move on through history and change and evolve. We're in the business of educating a lot of those folks from small communities. I mean [name of institution] is kind of the big city for some of those students, if you believe it or not. So, we know what it's like to live in a small community. We know what it's like to be a teacher in a small community. We know what it's like to be a business person in a small community. We know what it's like to be a farmer or a rancher on the high plains. Those are the things that I think we do very well.

These comments outline the number of external organizations that are or can be affected by a small, rural institution. Some presidents expressed how they garner more influence on community affairs than their urban counterparts where there is a greater population and more organizational diversity. A college or university campus is of critical importance to a surrounding rural community. To keep it vibrant, most presidents interviewed felt it important for a leader to have experience in small, rural communities. President Barnes' story included farming and rural town life:

>   I farmed for 15 years in the summers when I was teaching. . . . Small campuses like stability and long term people. I think it's safe to say that. They often prefer to have someone from within instead of without; they don't trust people from far away. I grew up in a town of 2,000; so this was a town of 2,000, no change. . . . But I lived in

[name of large city]. I was working at [name of large institution] before I came here.

So I had a contract there, and I really enjoyed the small school atmosphere. You

really get to know and get involved with your students. That's why we're here.

President Ward and his spouse came from a rural environment and that fact was

integral to their decision to choose their campus:

And so, we'd been, and my wife grew up on a farm, so we were both used to rural, so

I can even remember writing on the application materials for this position. The

ruralness didn't bother us. We liked it. So, we liked the fact that we were used to

being in small towns and kind of knew what to expect and how they were.

President Barnes summarized the sentiments of all of the presidents well:

I was going to AASCU [the American Association of State Colleges and Universities]

for years, and I represented [name of state] for a number of years, so I'd had to visit

with presidents from all states of the union, and there's different philosophies. I think

you can kind of pick different regions to say they think a little differently than others

and the [name of region] is unique in different ways, and that might be one of the

ways. I'm not sure. . . . I speak at universities sometimes about Higher Ed

leadership, and the feedback I always get back is "Gee, the other Presidents talked

about the money, the budget, the grants, and you talked about people." . . . Well that's

interesting, and I thought, "Well, why wouldn't they talk about people? That's why

we're here."

Many leaders espoused the importance of choosing a president who not only

understands the culture and context of an institution, but understands themselves, their

leadership style and values, and knows that understanding rural communities is critical to

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building a sustainable campus. President Ward described the nature of small, rural

campuses:

> Small campuses like stability and long-term people. They often prefer to have
>
> someone from within instead of without; they don't trust people from far away. . . . I
>
> grew up in a town of 2,000; so this was a town of 2,000 – no change. . . . You really
>
> get to know and get involved with your students. That's why we're here.

Building on the sentiments of appreciating rural environments, President Barnes

described these conditions:

> This community is a remote community. . . . You have to have an appreciation for [a]
>
> small town, being a little far away from an urban area, and not having 20 of
>
> everything. I wouldn't have gotten the position if those things were going to be
>
> problems for me because the committee saw that I was adaptable enough and have
>
> lived in communities like this before.

Although experiencing a small town can be a surprise to some, all presidents

expressed the importance of experience and appreciation for their settings. Most deliberately

chose their institution for its location, culture, and people. President Ward, along with his

spouse, embraced their rural heritage and specifically sought out their campus:

> I moved around . . . all rural, . . . and my wife grew up on a farm, so we were both
>
> used to rural. I can even remember writing on the application materials for this
>
> position. The ruralness didn't bother us. We liked it. So, we liked the fact that we
>
> were used to being in small towns and kind of knew what to expect and how they
>
> were.

President Barnes summarized well the sentiments of all presidents interviewed:

I speak at universities sometimes about Higher Ed leadership, and the feedback I

always get back is, "Gee, the other presidents talked about the money, the budget, the

grants, and you talked about people." . . . That's why we're here.

It's about the people. This is perhaps the strongest statement that all nine presidents

interviewed had in common. They passionately cared about people, and especially those that

came from small, rural town environments. Whether farmers or local physicians, these

presidents had a passion and commitment for understanding and serving the needs of all

stakeholders associated with their rural campus.

Wear Many Hats

For an individual used to the wide variety of amenities associated with urban and

suburban living, adjustment to a remote rural location may prove difficult. Ruralness and the

culture of a community create a unique set of circumstances where presidents often wear

many hats (they have many roles). Often, small institutions do not have the depth and

breadth of staff that larger institutions, especially larger land-grant institutions, enjoy. So

presidents often perform multiple duties not necessarily expected of their colleagues at larger

institutions located in more urban settings. President Stewart described the experience:

You know if you're at a small institution you have to wear a lot of hats. And not that

I'm jealous or anything, but [the president of a large land-grant university] has a staff

of a gazillion. He has people who write things for him and who do things for him and

who manage things for him. I have me, and I have an assistant and that's pretty much

my staff. . . . You have to be willing to get your hands dirty. . . . We had an alumni

event in the cities, so I went down with alumni folks and the development people, and

they got stuff to put on tables. So, I am helping them hand out stuff, and they are

kind of looking at me like what? So, we are all involved. They [larger institutions]

have resources, and they're more than one person deep.

Having less professional faculty and staff is one circumstance rural presidents recognize and

appreciate. President Barnes described the willingness of a president to take on more work

during a budget crisis:

> [In handling a budget], we said we will not lay off any custodians because we had a
>
> million dollars to right away make up in debt. We need a clean campus if we're
>
> going to get students. We're not going to lay off anybody in the administrative
>
> offices as they help get these students. The only ones we eliminated were the vice
>
> president and another top-level cabinet. I did three jobs the first year I was the
>
> president; I was the vice president for academic affairs, and I was a foundation
>
> director. That took care of about 400,000 dollars of debt itself on my back. Then we
>
> didn't hire a foundation director for about 6 years, so I doubled on that as well.

This narrative demonstrates not only the complexity of the presidency, but highlights

the depth of commitment these presidents make in leading their institutions. Yet another

unique aspect of a rural presidency is the lack of anonymity when out in the public.

Live in a Fish Bowl

Many presidents felt that in serving in a small town, community awareness of their

actions was much greater than their urban counterparts experienced, and they sometimes felt

as if they were "living in a fishbowl" where they were always under the scrutiny of

community members. And, in a rural location, everybody knows you. So you plan extra

time for grocery shopping because inevitably you run into someone who wants to talk,

neighbors stroll past the garage to see what is happening, and community members comment

on seeing particular cars in your driveway. One president expressed the weight of having so many individuals sharing their private information. Another described the importance of deliberately dressing "for the coffee shop," making sure to dress casually and like others in the community, to build trust in the community. President Parker outlined important considerations such as lack of anonymity:

> Since I was born and raised in the Midwest, I know that you [Rural Midwesterners] don't draw a lot of attention to yourself. As the president, . . . the president is everywhere. They can't distinguish the difference. [A president] must be very careful as there is no anonymity. . . . You must become adept at talking differently to different people and audiences. I have reverence for an agrarian economy. They are self-sufficient, resilient, and collaborative, and I need to respect these qualities.

If not accustomed to these circumstances, presidents may be caught unaware and make unflattering decisions. Many told stories, some humorous, of how the public was always watching not only their efforts, but the efforts of their families. President Jenkins described nosey staff asking about important houseguests:

> Living in a town like this, we had a donor workshop on Monday and the president of the board said, "We have some things we're trying to manage in the system right now. Can I come over and visit with you?" They [the board president and his spouse] came by, and we visited. The next day, the CEO of the foundation stopped and said, "Did they drop by your house last night?" Their car was seen in my driveway.

President Parker described pressure, especially during the first year when impressions are so important:

The biggest surprise, everywhere I go, I am the president. This was especially

difficult during the first year when everything matters. Everyone wants to please you.

Everything you say is serious and very weighty. Many assumptions and conclusions

are made.

President Simmons described how the community watches and comments on everyday

events:

People know what's going on, or they'll call you when they think they know more

than they do, so you're kind of in a fishbowl. . . . There's no anonymity here either,

which . . . I grew up in a small town, so I understand that everybody knows my

business. . . . My [spouse] laughs . . . when the garage door's open., people look into

the garage. We have a really big garage, and they're waving at me and knowing that

I'm working on something.

Whether shopping at the grocery store or working at home, presidents in small, rural

towns described a lack of anonymity and community curiosity as typical. They also

reiterated the importance of an incoming president understanding this culture when accepting

their position. Failure to appreciate the nuances and culture or a rural setting can lead to an

uncomfortable presidency.

Right Fit for Specific Institution and Culture

While all presidents agreed that the rural location of their institutions has had an

impact on their presidency, they also stressed the greater importance of matching a president

to a specific institution. Although small rural universities share much in common, each

institution is unique, and a president needs to be suitable to the unique opportunities and

challenges of an institution they wish to serve. The presidents were often emotional as well

as grateful to be selected by their campus hiring committees. Stories of their journeys to their presidencies were most emotional. President Bailey described the experience of being chosen for his/her institution:

> I see it sort of like a soulmate match. . . . It's not that you're good or not good; it's whether you're the one or not the one. Because there are many who could do it, but at this particular point in time, they wanted me. . . . So, I look at it as a match making.

President Bailey's sentiments reflect that of most. In presidential searches, as several discussed, at least the final candidates have the necessary qualifications to lead. The distinction comes in matching the culture of the institution to the capabilities of the incoming president. President Parker expanded on the importance of style and background on matching president and institution:

> You really have to look at the place and time and where the institution needs to go and who can help take it there. . . . Maybe size plays a role in that. I think my own background plays a role and the fact that I'm first generation, and that I don't take any of this for granted. I think the fact that I'm more of a servant leader than an authoritarian leader. Also, I think style matters a lot.

President Stewart spoke to the mission of his/her institution as unique and compelling:

> I don't think I ever would be president anywhere else. . . . There's something about this institution that really speaks to me. I think, especially for those of us who are at these small colleges, you have to be in love, right? And, you have to, the mission has to speak to you in a certain way. It's that whole notion of, really, the place has to just resonate in a certain way, and there's not interchangeable institutions.

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It is difficult to summarize how participants described the depth of experience needed by a president serving a rural institution and the importance of matching the right president to the right campus. At minimum, participants impressed upon me how important it was for presidents to have a deep commitment to the rural culture in their communities and to make sure opportunities of advancement were available to faculty, staff, students, and their communities. Participants as a whole wanted to lead in environments where their understanding, compassion, and leadership could have a positive impact on a community.

The stakeholders in this study, whether students, faculty, staff, donors, alumni, or community members, are all shaped by being rural. They are humble and trust each other, but slow at trusting strangers. They are strong and self-sufficient, and leaders wear many hats. Community members show high social capital – in other words, they are socially tight or close knit, and often slow to change, but all share a commitment and pride in supporting their beloved campuses. They recognize the value of higher education, and in spite of scarce resources, they fight to keep their higher education institutions open, especially since rural communities also usually rely on their colleges and universities economically. For presidents that have chosen to be leaders in these rural positions, it's all about the people. They care about people – their students, faculty, staff, and community members – the rural, small town people they wish to enable to grow and thrive.

As noted, rather than putting forward a list of competencies each president felt was needed for institutional leaders to be successful, the narratives, when considered collectively, described a rich and complex process of presidential leadership. This process developed into a grounded theory portraying the common wisdom of these presidents in a way that can

provide insight and guidance for future leaders as well as those hiring future presidential

leaders.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Leadership can take many forms and be displayed in many practices. Leaders of organizations are often thought of as guides leading their institutions into the future, but how this is accomplished varies dramatically. Leaders often give direct orders, inspire individuals to act, lead development of complex missions or strategies, envision the future, then align all actors within an organization to act. Ideally, these actions guide the organization toward a more promising future. With rising pressure on universities, especially public institutions, to be the economic engines that inspire talent, drive economic development, and produce research to improve society, all while state support dwindles and public demands rise, strong academic leadership is becoming more and more important (MacTaggart, 2017).

Presidents I interviewed espoused an unparalleled passion to meet challenges and ensure their institutions thrive into the future. I was humbled and honored by their generosity and candor in sharing their stories. These stories illuminated the importance of viewing leadership as a process. Their wisdom and compassion for playing a key role in the prosperity of their campuses and communities was inspiring. Their insights and commitment to the future engendered an urgency to not only tell their stories, but to generate momentum to enable next generations to meet challenges that will undoubtedly be faced in the future.
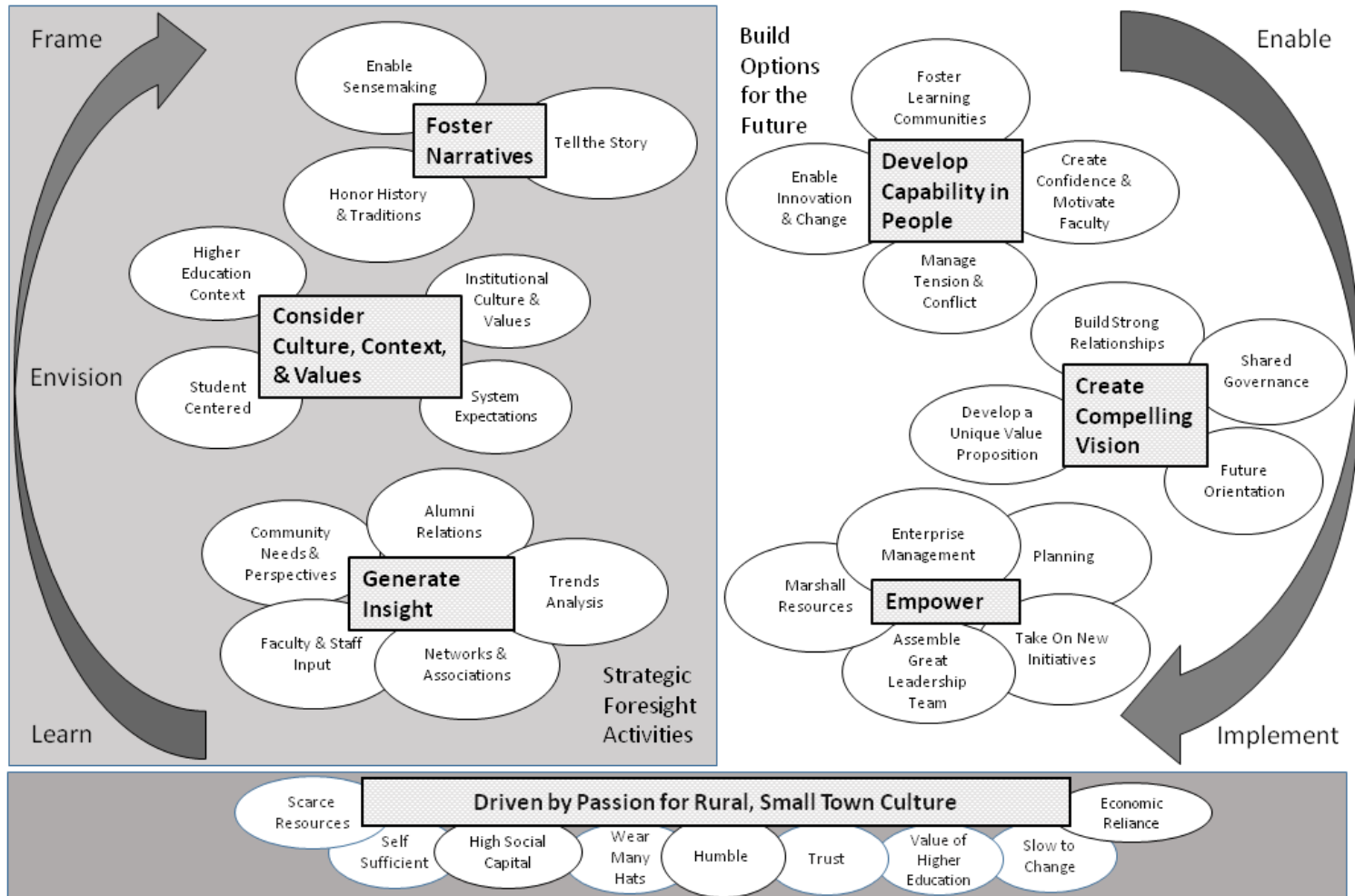
Presidential leadership is a process. It is complex and messy, with many elements (in the past, present, and future) taking place at once. This makes description difficult.

Although the framework I documented may appear linear, it is important to note it is not. The process evolves as a president continues to learn and grow in their position.

Lustig (2015) discussed how in order to make choices, create change, and flourish, a leader must "renew" their organization on a regular basis. Lustig created a visual description of this renewal called the Cycle of Transformational Renewal (Lustig, 2015). This cycle contained many elements of leadership described by participants. Figure 2 contains a model that focuses on a higher education context and expands on Patricia Lustig's (2015) Cycle of Transformational Renewal highlighting strategic foresight to describe actions and strategies revealed by participants in this study.

Presidents are continually learning (MacTaggart, 2017; Scott et al., 2008). The unique needs of small university campuses, as described by participating presidents, require leaders who are adaptive and systems-oriented, that address complexity through learning and team work. President leaders need to be culturally aware and able to understand the perspectives of those from different educational backgrounds, cultures, and increasingly, ethnicities. Many participants voiced the importance of establishing artful processes that allow participation and input from an entire campus of stakeholders (students, faculty, staff) while also achieving action and accountability. The comprehensive actions and strategies presidents participating in this study felt were important for their future closely align with the strategic foresight process framework identified by Patricia Lustig (2015) in her research on moving organizations beyond crises. As with many frameworks, the process described by Lustig was adapted to fit the uniqueness of small, rural, public university presidents. The process described by presidents of this study, including all the actions and strategies participants identified as essential are shown in the grounded theory model in Figure 2.

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Presidential Leadership in Rural Higher Education Institutions Is a Continual Learning Process Enabling Institutions to Continue to Move Forward in Complex Changing Environments

Frame

Enable

Enable Sensemaking

Foster Narratives

Tell the Story

Honor History & Traditions

Build Options for the Future

Foster Learning Communities

Develop Capability in People

Enable Innovation & Change

Create Confidence & Motivate Faculty

Manage Tension & Conflict

Higher Education Context

Institutional Culture & Values

Consider Culture, Context, & Values

Envision

Student Centered

System Expectations

Build Strong Relationships

Shared Governance

Develop a Unique Value Proposition

Create Compelling Vision

Future Orientation

Alumni Relations

Community Needs & Perspectives

Generate Insight

Trends Analysis

Faculty & Staff Input

Networks & Associations

Strategic Foresight Activities

Enterprise Management

Planning

Marshall Resources

Empower

Assemble Great Leadership Team

Take On New Initiatives

Learn

Implement

Scarce Resources

Driven by Passion for Rural, Small Town Culture

Economic Reliance

Self Sufficient

High Social Capital

Wear Many Hats

Humble

Trust

Value of Higher Education

Slow to Change

Figure 2. Grounded theory model.

Grounded by a passion for rural, small town culture, the central phenomenon participants identified in this study was that presidential leadership in rural higher education institutions is a continual learning process enabling institutions to continue to move forward in complex, changing environments. In the grounded theory developed in this study and displayed in Figure 2, part of the leadership process entails actions presidents use to garner strategic foresight (strategic foresight activities), enabling presidents to learn, envision, and frame opportunities and challenges the institution faces. These ideas are represented by the arrow on the left side of the figure moving upward. The themes described in Chapter IV associated with creating strategic foresight activities include: *generate insight*; *consider culture, context, and values*; and *foster narratives*. Activities described within these themes enable stakeholders to understand opportunities or challenges and participate in moving their organizations forward.

Also, represented by the arrow on the right side of the diagram moving downward, the leadership process presidents described also involves activities that build options for the future. These activities entail enabling faculty, staff, and students to learn and envision the positive future the president has envisioned, then allowing stakeholders involved to implement plans that build on what has been learned. Themes described in Chapter IV associated with building options for the future include: *develop capability in people*, *creating compelling vision*, and *empower* others to act. As described by the presidents, all of this is grounded by a passion for small town, rural culture. A culture that is unique to rural environments.

It is important to note that while the learning process presidents described appears linear, leadership is not a straight forward, linear process. Considerations and learning

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involving the past, present, and future take place simultaneously and are often overlapping. The process is complex and requires significant energy and passion to meet the challenge.

Strategic Foresight Activities – Learn, Envision, and Frame

Presidents cannot predict the future; however, increasing forces of change both internally and externally mean they must make wise decisions today to prepare their campuses for a thriving future (Kezar et al, 2006; White & Eckel, 2010). Using data and observations to plan a strategy for the future is often referred to as the process of strategic foresight (Lustig, 2015). White and Eckel (2010), in their leadership studies, asserted that foresight is one of the most critical elements of university leadership. They ascribed successful university leadership to three fundamental capabilities. First, a president needs to have a firm understanding of their campus' assets and what can realistically be achieved, allowing them to create a vision for the future. Second, they must assess potential challenges that may arise in pursuit of their vision. Finally, it is imperative they design an actionable strategy that allows the entire campus to participate and achieve success.

Exercising strategic foresight allows a president to learn about trends affecting their institution, consider the culture and context surrounding these trends, and foster narratives that bridge opportunities presented in the trends with the strengths of the history, culture, and context of their institution (Lustig, 2015; Freeman & Kochan, 2013). Through this process, they learn of opportunities and envision a thriving future.

The unique process of honoring the past, understanding culture and context, then identifying appropriate initiatives to build a strong future is often described as strategic foresight. Strategic foresight is the ability to create and sustain high quality future options and apply these options beneficially to an organization (Lustig, 2015). Presidents I met all

recounted using strategic foresight in their daily routines. Although there have been many

frameworks associated with foresight, Patricia Lustig's (2015) Cycle of Transformational

Renewal aligns well with actions the presidents in this study described. Lustig asserted the

importance of strategic foresight is an ability to harness collective and diverse wisdom of an

organization and make decisions members can assimilate and align with their personal

objectives.

Learn

The presidents I interviewed routinely expressed the importance of shared governance

and were humble in understanding they did not possess all the answers. They openly

expressed how they depended upon having a great team helping them. These "learning"

leaders constantly gather insight by routinely interacting with students, parents, alumni,

faculty, staff, and community members. The size of small communities acts to elevate

presidential recognition in the community and has placed the presidents in this study in the

spotlight continuously. In addition to paying attention to their rural communities, most

participants asserted the importance of attending national conferences, such as those

conducted by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), in

order to spend time with other presidents and learn key trends in their field. As participants

espoused, it is often incumbent on a president to inspire fresh insights and new ways of

thinking to the region they serve by seeking and enabling others to experience national and

global opportunities. These actions demonstrate a commitment to continual learning and

growth of their campuses.

The presidents in this study also reflected on the increasing importance of taking

input from all stakeholders of their institutions, both internally and externally. Information

gathered by their institutional research staffs, from attending conferences as well as networking with other subject matter experts, contributed to their understanding of opportunities and challenges in higher education. Whether formal or informal, presidents in this study have combined these key insights to create options for the future of their institutions and communities. Actions of presidents interviewed denoted the importance of continuing to learn new knowledge and insights based on facts. Understanding the nature and availability of data in order to make informed decisions will continue to be an important process for future leaders as well.

Envision

As potential develops, presidents of small institutions combine their tacit understandings of the role of a university with a heightened sense of culture on their campuses as well as their surrounding communities. In rural towns, presidents often feel their university exerts a larger footprint and has more immediate impact on a community than urban counterparts. The presidents in this study were not only aware of this impact, but openly discussed the importance of being deliberate in meeting people where they are at and assimilating language, dress, and demeanor to match stakeholders and create on-going relationships. The vast difference in education levels, world views, and expectations of rural residents combined with strong social ties and multiple roles played by rural citizens increases the complexity of issues presidents weigh when making decisions about directions to take their institutions. The presidents in this study have considered a vast array of factors and all constituents when leading the development of a common vision for their institutions. As the presidents relayed, this vision includes a larger component that affects their communities more than visions of their urban counterparts affect urban communities.

Frame

The process of taking insights and framing potential allows leaders to consider options, clarify objectives, and develop initiatives to meet the most promising opportunities. Once they have created and internalized their own mental models of potential, leaders assert the importance of clear and transparent communications in relaying and building potential. Leaders in this study described fostering narratives that would weave respect for the past with future opportunities to help others make sense of the direction their institution was headed. Framing issues and objectives well, as described by the presidents, highlights the importance of clear and well-planned communications in leading a campus. Additionally, the presidents expressed the importance of creating a viable framework that allows internal and external stakeholders to develop common goals for their institution. Once options have been considered and put into the context of an institution's framework for the future, presidents lead their "learning organization" in building options for the future together.

Build Options for the Future

Although they clearly had insights and thoughts about the future, presidents in this study clearly understood they could not act alone. Nor were they in a position to dictate actions on their campuses. Most presidents interviewed expressed the importance of shared governance and spent time nurturing a shared governance process. Shared governance was described by presidents as enabling others to make sense of future possibilities. Once a vision and direction has been established, presidents expressed the importance of building capability in everyone from faculty to students to understand that vision and act on it, allowing for a vibrant future. Participants also expressed the importance of taking action and

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not spending too much time analyzing information. It was important for a campus to implement strategy.

Enable

In this study, once presidents framed potential and began sharing narratives to shape visions, they considered what capabilities in faculty and staff needed to be developed in order to harness opportunities. Capabilities of leaders outlined in Chapter IV described actions presidents often took to enable their faculties, staffs, and students to create together a compelling vision that could be shared and enacted by all campus members. A shared vision creates a platform on which presidents can empower and build strong teams.

Enabling faculty and staff took many forms in this study. Some presidents created committees or learning communities, while others offered opportunities to advance a particular subject. Most discussed the importance of continuing professional development by all. One comment made by a few of the presidents is that funding for new initiatives, including training for change and innovation, is often limited. One explained that legislators confuse sabbaticals, driven by faculty, with professional development identified by campus leadership. Given this sentiment and its importance, future leaders and governing bodies might want to pay particular attention to funding and opportunities for professional development to ensure campuses are empowered to innovate and change with changing demands.

Implement

Implementation, action, and accountability took place through teamwork on these rural, engaged campuses. Teamwork generates feedback so a process can repeat more effectively. In actuality, all of these elements have taken place simultaneously. To these

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presidents, it is incumbent on a leader to continually monitor generation of insights, development of opportunities, and implementation of actions to assure a campus continues to transform and meet its future potential. As stated earlier, this process is multi-faceted and anything but linear, giving rise to the importance of emotional intelligence and strategic foresight addressing the complexity of a rural university presidency.

Driven by Passion for Rural, Small Town Culture

The process of generating and harnessing strategic foresight for action may be enacted in urban or rural settings; however, the richness, commitment, and complexity of a rural small-town presidency is in the culture and context of being rural. I found all presidents in this study shared an unrelenting appreciation and passionate commitment to enabling small and rural town communities to thrive. They were steadfast in their sentiment that a president of these types of institutions have a keen understanding of both the opportunities and challenges a rural, small town location presents. Although some might see accepting a presidency in a rural environment as a stepping stone to other opportunities, the presidents I interviewed illustrated that this idea, without a strong commitment to advancing rural people, might lead to a difficult, if not failed, presidency. Several of the presidents referred to their leadership as more of a "calling" where their entire life is dedicated to the institution. Without this dedication and commitment, they were clear that the top leader would not likely thrive.

Although many communities are different, rural towns visited and described by presidents in this study share several similarities. There is a tight social network, where individuals play multiple roles such as being a pharmacist, mayor, and a church member. They have a deep sense of pride and support for their university but also expect to have a say

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in operations. This can make change difficult. As described by the presidents, many rural

faculty and staff have attended the university, lived in the community since youth, and/or

held a campus position for a long tenure. They can see the glory of the past and may be

reluctant to transform. In addition, small town culture is often slow to trust outsiders.

Failure to appreciate these nuances can lead to strong barriers to action in a presidency.

Faculty and staff of rural institutions, like others, also share multiple roles and can

have a greater-than-typical influence in their community (compared to urban settings),

according to the leaders interviewed. They all look to their president, day and night, to

model the way. Sometimes this makes presidents feel like they live in a fishbowl where they

and their family are subjected to constant scrutiny.

However, being rural brings many rewards. The presidents in this study felt they

enjoy closer access to and have richer relationships with students than their urban colleagues.

Participants described activities like homecoming bringing together an entire community and

alumni. This allows presidents to maintain close relationships with former students and often

see the outcomes of student endeavors after graduation. These rural presidents shared stories

from the past and took pride in the progress former students have made in life. This creates a

passion that is almost too rich to put into words. I am humbled by the experience of hearing

stories about reunions between participants and their former students.

I found that presidents I interviewed from small, rural public universities are the

ultimate learning leaders. They simultaneously continue to learn and identify future

opportunities while taking on a bigger breadth of responsibilities than their larger more urban

counterparts. Often, rural presidents lack the economies of scale necessary to justify the

administrative planning with staff enjoyed by their larger colleagues. Because of this

situation, presidents of small, rural institutions must be particularly diligent in seeking new knowledge and information. They may have to adapt new methods of discovery unlike their larger counterparts.

Small town culture is challenging and beloved. Watching the expressions of presidents during interviews as they described their journeys, seeking opportunities and committing to leading their institutions to meet possibilities, reinforced the importance of appreciation presidents need for leading a rural way of life. Some of the presidents described situations where both they and their families had to become accustomed to constant scrutiny and "everyone knowing what you are doing all the time." One president laughed about how, when grocery shopping, people tended to examine the contents of their cart. Most presidents expressed the importance of individuals accepting rural presidencies as understanding this critical aspect of leadership in small, rural areas. Very little of a president's or their family's actions is considered private by stakeholders.

It is this passion presidents displayed during interviews that inspires stakeholders on campuses to identify and embrace the unique value presidents provide a rural higher education community and to take pride in that value and thrive. Dedication and commitment of presidents were obvious with most presidents visited. After reviewing findings of this study, one president called with comments. She was concerned that she did not talk enough about the rewards of being a president and the emotion she feels when she knows her support enabled others, whether students, faculty, or community members to accomplish something important to them. Her sentiment was that small, rural communities pay more attention and celebrate the accomplishments that happen at their universities more than urban peers.

The underlying emotion and the unwavering dedication portrayed by all nine presidents interviewed highlights the importance of recognizing not just a list of competencies needed to become a successful president, but to recognize the uniqueness each institution brings to its surrounding community. University presidents value and fortify the emotional intelligence and relationship building critical to leading their universities. In McDaniel's (2002) work, she identified four sets of competencies for presidents: process, content, context, and communication. For each category, she listed multiple traits identified as important. After interviewing each president, it became apparent that leadership is more than a list that can be "checked off" as complete. As presidents mentioned in some fashion, most final candidates come to institutions possessing the necessary competencies to lead an institution. It is the emotional intelligence and appreciation for rural culture that makes an individual a great fit for a rural organization.

As described by each president, "the fit" matters when a president first accepts a position and "the fit" continues to grow and strengthen as a leader continues to learn. This learning is enabled by the passion and commitment of presidents to advance their university's mission. Many times, the successful outcome of an endeavor, such as budget cutting without cutting positions like custodian, depended on a president taking on many additional tasks not normally considered presidential tasks. Some relayed that their urban counterparts would probably not do such a thing. Most importantly, all presidents insisted future leaders need to carefully consider and appreciate culture and conditions leading in a rural, remote setting may offer. If a person is "the right fit," appreciation for culture and passion will propel the leader into a successful presidency.

As expressed in multiple ways, future presidents are likely to continue to see dwindling state support, increased public scrutiny, and changing student expectations. This is likely to put pressure on raising revenue for generations. As several of the presidents outlined, with public funds continuing to diminish, alumni are just now beginning to realize the importance of giving as their private counterparts have been doing. Presidents will have to continue to balance academic history and the reality of an enterprise to develop a niche in the educational market and industry and invent new revenue streams for their institutions. Presidents interviewed expressed that part of this niche, or value proposition, might likely be based upon the rich experience students are exposed to when choosing a small, rural university. In part, this value can come from the experience of playing a significant role in impacting the surrounding community.

Implications for Governing Boards and Hiring Committees

Eddy (2007, 2012) and Leist (2007) espoused the importance of a Board in understanding the culture and needs of a rural, small town when hiring a president of an institution. This sentiment was greatly reinforced by the presidents I interviewed. Whether laughing about stories of folks passing by to peak in their garage or having to plan an extra hour to make a trip to the grocery in order to allow for conversation, the unique culture and expectations of stakeholders of these rural public universities has played a significant role in the success of a presidency. It is critical that governing boards carefully consider the context of faculty, staff, and students on campus, the enterprise needs of their institution, and the expectations of their surrounding community when making a decision. Presidents in this study were direct and adamant that experience in a rural setting is of paramount importance to high quality selection of a president. While this is indicative of a bias that does not

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recognize that some leaders succeed in new areas even without experience, presidents

underscored the importance to success of understanding rural culture and conditions.

Presidents of the institutions in this study relayed "wearing more hats" and being

"closer to the ground" than their larger urban counterparts. Further, all presidents

interviewed identified some form of business experience in their background, which they

perceived was not always the case with larger institutions. One had a PhD in business, one

ran a public/private business initiative at another institution, and many ran university

divisions such as student services that purported some form of business management. Two

identified power struggles with their Chief Financial Officer when taking the reins. Although

academics will always be of paramount importance at an institution of higher learning,

presidential leaders of rural types of institutions will need to have exposure to business and

entrepreneurial concepts in order to effectively run their institutions and continue to generate

a value proposition that assures future sustainability.

Implications for Policy Makers

First, policy makers need to strongly consider a trend prevalent at the time of this

study of decreasing investment in public universities. As the U.S. population ages, public

spending on healthcare and infrastructure such as transportation and tax cuts, to name a few,

is "squeezing out" investment in our future, in higher education, and this could create a

downward spiral in our education and our economy, especially in a world of global

competition where educational choices are growing. In his research on tuition inflation,

Donald Heller (2011) asserted that as healthcare and infrastructure needs grow, legislators

and citizens alike have come to treat higher education expenditures as discretionary funding.

He does not predict this trend will change any time soon. Due to these factors, presidents

feel new options for funding education need to be discovered or difficult choices need to be made so students continue to enjoy the prosperity an educated public brings to a country. This is especially true in rural regions where economies struggle with change.

Finally, for states where rural universities are governed by a system, which was the case for all presidents interviewed, government relations staff might highlight why legislators might better consider the value rural institutions and their increased influence bring to the regions they serve. According to several presidents interviewed, financial allocation models favor larger institutions with economies of scale, therefore policy makers might want to be expressive in their expectations to empower and encourage rural lifelong learning. Failure to recognize and address this critical public service could result in campus closures, further reducing rural access to knowledge and innovation. Access to lifelong learning is expected to be a critical factor in global competitiveness, and presidents feel it is important for rural regions to be recognized for their important contributions to the global economy.

Implications for Higher Education Graduate Programs and Aspiring Leaders

Because so many institutions, especially in regions surveyed, have been affected by rural and small-town culture, educational leadership programs might consider adding the context and culture of rural into at least optional courses. All presidents interviewed reflected on how important the influence of a rural culture has been when they make decisions for their campuses, especially when identifying an important niche critical to sustainability. Because of tight social networks in rural regions and the higher interaction rural institutions have with their communities, experiential coursework could be added to leadership programs; students could perform case studies, give presentations, and create needed applications for institutions that might lack administrative staff to accomplish these

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tasks, but welcome the attention of a graduate studies program that could do valuable work for an institution while training leaders.

Additionally, as presidents of rural institutions feel they have more influence on their students, having direct access to students, aspiring rural leaders might want to pay attention to trends in developing innovative pedagogy. Presidents of the institutions surveyed expressed spending significant time considering student needs, looking at trends, and inspiring faculty and staff to meet new challenges in learning. In the rural contexts evident in this study, learning was expressed as more prominent than research missions. While community engagement is important, many presidents tied this engagement to objectives to increase learning. Learning is the ultimate consideration; and future rural presidents, due to their high campus influence, might need a keen understanding of developing opportunities. Creativity and enabling others to innovate to build lifelong learning capacity into rural institutions brings new attention, especially among funding legislators, to the influence and importance rural campuses have on their surrounding communities. The generation of new knowledge and ideas will continue to be important as regions compete in a global economy. Given this, future leaders may want to consider not only developing a keen understanding of the legislative process, but also to identifying the narratives (i.e. – tell the stories) that best enhance campus' constituent impact on key legislators.

Finally, in conjunction with innovative pedagogy, graduate programs might consider providing students with opportunities to consider alternative forms of revenue generation. Many presidents identified fund-raising, either directly or through grant attainment, as a growing part of their responsibilities. Public institutions are relying more on alumni donations as well as alternative sources to government funding for program development.

For example, one president personally spent hours identifying foundations that prioritized rural areas and pursued alternative federal funding sources through organizations like the USDA and EDA to develop initiatives prioritized by his/her community. Another made space in a busy schedule to attend fund-raising training. Identifying alternate (i.e. nonpublic) forms of revenue generation is expected to continue with a continued expectation that public investment will continue to dwindle (Heller, 2011).

Implications for Further Research

A few presidents interviewed reflected on emerging ideas or trends that could be further researched and added to the education of emerging leaders. One idea was to link disciplinary backgrounds to an individual's worldview and ability to accept change. One president described a "theoretical" continuum of individuals with various disciplinary backgrounds. An individual's willingness to be innovative and transform institutions would depend on his/her background with engineers being the most willing to innovate and transform institutions, and humanities professors, especially experts in history and languages, being least willing. It would be interesting to research such a continuum and identify whether or not there is a relationship between discipline and willingness to accept change. In addition to differing worldviews, different disciplines may be experiencing different circumstances. Some disciplines may be experiencing reductions in funding when others are not, changes in credit requirements, or other circumstances creating resistance to change. If there is such a relationship, it would be important to identify strategies and other enablers individuals would need to lead transformation and adapt to change. Such skills would then be an important skill set for the future.

The nature of the professoriate is being examined with respect to the future, changes occurring, and lifelong learning. Presidents in this study described a trend, a filling of some traditional tenure track positions with adjunct faculty. Some embraced this change and recognized that adjunct faculty can offer a different, maybe more applied, experience to students than traditional faculty. On the other hand, traditional faculty are usually more engaged on campus, remain current on research, and may be more available to students. Some presidents praised this potential – this use of adjunct faculty, while others expressed balancing adjunct faculty and tenured faculty as a way to meet budget expectations. Almost all addressed initiatives to explore options and build the best student experiences possible. More research might be conducted to identify challenges and opportunities adjunct faculty mixed with tenured faculty represents in "the student experience."

Closely related to a mix of faculty as a function of "spending," presidents in this study highlighted the need to better research and articulate how universities operate like businesses or enterprises and how they differ. One president suggested particular emphasis could be on comparing the role and organizational power of faculty versus the traditional role and organizational power of an employee. Similarly, how is the role of a faculty union similar or different than more "traditional" unions in manufacturing or public service? Several participants thought leaders should espouse the importance of including more business leaders in designing higher education change; however, presidents expressed on-going concerns over considering the context of higher education (MacTaggart, 2017; White & Eckel, 2010). More research and deliberate articulation describing how business and education interrelate may bring more shared understanding to business leaders, legislators, and public higher education personnel.

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Another interesting topic for future research would be to explore what "experts" believe the definition and ramifications of lifelong learning will mean to the future of higher education. The term "lifelong learning" was used a great deal by presidents interviewed and is becoming prevalent in higher education news media; however, understanding whether lifelong learning refers to formal or informal education, experiential or classroom education, or other aspects of education would be important to learn for envisioning the future, identifying the niches presidents expressed as important, and setting objectives for small, rural institutions.

One limitation of the study was the geographic region. Many of the presidents noted the uniqueness to this specific region. Further research could be done with similar institutions in other rural locations. Additional studies might also consider whether or not there are gender or other differences that might affect leadership style or choices. As both small and medium program size colleges and universities were used, perhaps further research could be done comparing institution size.

Final Thoughts

"Hope has always been at the core of higher education in the dreams of institutions to offer up a glimpse into what might be possible in the world" (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). This quote expresses the sentiments I witnessed on all nine campuses visited and lies at the core of what the participating presidents, who were driven by a passion for their missions and for bettering the communities they served, described. All nine presidents shared with me their ideas without reserve and were willing to share their deepest thoughts and experiences in order to strengthen the potential of future leaders. These presidents have been no doubt the ultimate "Learning Leaders" of their regions. Although they have faced

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many challenges, they have also been committed to the future of higher education and the promise their institutions bring to rural regions, especially students, but also to their entire communities.

As this dissertation was being written, major changes continued to occur in higher education, including in the regions studied. Many regions and/or states have been endeavoring to address pressures for change. At the time of this report, the Minnesota State System had just launched a major initiative called "Reimagining Minnesota State." The premise of this initiative has been to spend 2 years collectively studying how to evolve the culture of every institution in the system to be more risk-taking, innovative, and nimble in order to meet the increased pace of change required of institutions so they can thrive in the future. Conversation with Dr. Terrence MacTaggart (personal communication, December 17, 2018), president of the Association of Governing Boards and consultant for Minnesota's reimagining initiative, indicated North Dakota would soon launch a similar initiative. Finally, after 18 years at the time of this report, Nebraska had just named a new chancellor to oversee three state public institutions, all with strong rural roots. This chancellor, too, was expected to address transformation in the academy as a priority. These initiatives were too new at the time of this report to have put forward explicit plans or actions, but represented the importance of transformation in "the academy." All three initiatives acknowledged the critical, but unique, role small rural institutions will play in the future, giving access to lifelong learning for many. Perhaps a new research study could be formulated around the findings and effectiveness of these endeavors in addressing the challenges faced by these institutions.

There is little question that presidents of most universities: public, private, large or small, are facing challenges, especially keeping up with the pace of change and answering the public's call for transformation. Presidents in this study brought to life the richness and the importance of fully appreciating as well as accepting the challenge of leading in small, rural communities. Rural culture is unique and the challenges of leading in a rural context are many; however, with increased understanding of the nature of the role of rural universities, many campuses can and will find a vibrant future. This will depend upon how successfully future presidents are prepared to accept their responsibilities and the potential of rural education that lies ahead.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Colleges or Universities Meeting the Criteria for This Study

Name	Campus Setting	Undergraduate Students
Bemidji State University	Town: Remote	4791
Black Hills State University	Town: Distant	3896
Chadron State College	Town: Remote	2362
Dakota State University	Town: Distant	2820
Dickinson State University	Town: Remote	1310
Mayville State University	Rural: Remote	1091
Minot State University	Town: Remote	3070
Northern State University	Town: Remote	2991
Peru State College	Rural: Distant	2169
Southwest Minnesota State University	Town: Remote	6868
University of Minnesota-Crookston	Town: Distant	2823
University of Minnesota-Morris	Town: Remote	1856
University of Nebraska at Kearney	Town: Distant	5108
University of Wisconsin-River Falls	Town: Distant	5503
Valley City State University	Town: Remote	1278
Wayne State College	Town: Distant	2913

Appendix B
Set of Preliminary Codes

Group Heading - Preliminary Open Codes

Act – Active Involvement
Act – Align Around Students
Act – Advocate for Institution
Act – Articulating With Other Institutions
Act – Communicate Value of Higher Education Institution (HEI) to Public
Act – Convene and Encourage Alignment Among Stakeholders
Act – Create Networks
Act – Working With Alumni
Act – Build Future
Act – Create Vision and Niche for Institution
Act – Environmental Scan
Act – Execute Strategic Plan
Act – Move Toward Desired Future
Act – Plan for the Future
Act – Set Goals
Act – Take on New Initiatives
Act – Assemble Good Team
Act – Coach
Act – Empower and Hold Accountable
Act – Solve Problems
Act – Build Trust
Act – Create Hope AFFECTIVE
Act – Act

Capability – Create Effective Processes
Capability – Data Driven Analysis
Capability – Foresight
Capability – Foster Mission
Capability – Get Things Done
Capability – Solve Problems

Characteristic – Academic HEI
Characteristic – Intent to be President
Characteristic – Mentored by Someone
Characteristic – Same Institution Before President Over 5 Years
Characteristic – Non-Academic HEI Route

Group Heading - Preliminary Open Codes

Emotional Intelligence – Communicate Clearly and Transparently
Emotional Intelligence – Create Confidence
Emotional Intelligence – Create Enjoyable Environment
Emotional Intelligence – Create Passion for the Mission
Emotional Intelligence – Respect Others
Emotional Intelligence – Transform People
Emotional Intelligence – Inclusivity

Experience – Institution Type

HEI Condition – Hierarchy and Tradition General

Knowledge – Small Town Culture/Rural Location
Knowledge – How to Handle Crisis/Conflict
Knowledge – Association Resources
Knowledge – Accreditation
Knowledge – Athletics
Knowledge – Business Skills
Knowledge – Create Effective Processes
Knowledge – Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
Knowledge – Enrollment
Knowledge – Higher Education (HE) Finances
Knowledge – HEIs in General
Knowledge – How to Work in University Systems
Knowledge – Know How to Serve Students
Knowledge – Law/Risk
Knowledge – Legislative Process/Influence
Knowledge – Maintenance and Capital Improvements
Knowledge – Many Types of Institutions
Knowledge – Academic Programming
Knowledge – Fundraising/Diversify Funding
Knowledge – Technology's Place in Higher Ed
Knowledge – Work Within a University System

Lens - Political

Group Heading - Preliminary Open Codes

President Condition – Culture Specific to Institution
President Condition – Accept Burden
President Condition – Adaptable
President Condition – Always Represent Institution
President Condition – Calling
President Condition – Don't Have All Answers
President Condition – Embrace and Love Job
President Condition – Fish Bowl
President Condition – Gender Struggles
President Condition – Institutional Fit
President Condition – Lonely at the Top
President Condition – Not Enough Time on Future
President Condition – Not Everyone Wants You to Succeed
President Condition – Resistance to Change
President Condition – Right Institution
President Condition – Steward of Lifelong Education for All Stakeholders
President Condition – Wear Lots of Hats
President Condition – Leadership Preparation Before President

Skill – Create Compelling Vision
Skill – Innovate
Skill – Know When to Stay Out
Skill – Leadership
Skill – Make Tough Decisions
Skill – Manage Change
Skill – Model the Way
Skill – Motivate Faculty
Skill – Relationship Building
Skill – See Opportunity
Skill – Sensemaking
Skill – Strategic
Skill – Take Control When Necessary
Skill – Transparency
Skill – Understand Community and Outreach
Skill – Understand Community Importance
Skill – Understand Cultural Context

Group Heading - Preliminary Open Codes

Stakeholder – External
Stakeholder – Faculty
Stakeholder - Staff

Suggested HE System Improvements

Trait – General Traits
Trait – Comfortable With Ambiguity
Trait – Complex Thinker
Trait – Entrepreneurial
Trait – Emotional Quotient (EQ)
Trait – Good Listener
Trait – Humble
Trait – Passionate About Institution
Trait – Work and Personal Life Balanced

Transform Pressure – Diversity Equity Inclusion
Transform Pressure – Governance and Employment Changing
Transform Pressure – Increased Public Scrutiny
Transform Pressure – Increasing Pace of Change
Transform Pressure – Lifelong Education Need
Transform Pressure – Need for Sustainable Residential Campus
Transform Pressure – Reduced Investment by Legislature
Transform Pressure – Student Expectations Drive Enrollment

Appendix C
Acknowledgement of Personal Bias

All researchers have a personal ontology and bias as they approach their research (Creswell, 2014). With over 20 years of experience working in rural communities, including working with presidents and chancellors of universities located in these areas, I have a bias that skills needed by administrators to be successful in this type of cultural environment are different than skills needed by their urban/suburban counterparts. I also am biased that decisions made at the top level in rural areas have more impact on faculty and staff than decisions made at the top level do on faculty and staff in urban areas. Also, I believe community members surrounding an institution expect more personal knowledge and commitment to their community from administrators in rural areas than community members in urban areas expect from urban administrators.

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