

Senior Academic Leaders' Involvement in and Interpretation of the Presidential
Transition Process at Private, Selective, Nonprofit Colleges and Universities
Analyzed Through an Organizational Decision-Making Framework

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Aunt, Susan Marie Sauer.

“Do what you find you are most passionate about. Trust in yourself. Leave a place better than when you arrived. Love openly and have fun.”

Acknowledgments

I was able to complete this dissertation only because of the love and support I have been given from so many throughout my life. I would first like to thank my professors and the entire community at my alma mater, Hampden-Sydney College. Hampden-Sydney provided me with the skills and confidence to complete this work. My alma mater provided me with lifelong friends and wonderful colleagues. That experience also provided me with two role models, retired Dean of Students Dr. Lewis Drew and retired President Lt. General Samuel Wilson, who serve as examples of selfless leaders dedicated to serving others. That transformative experience inspired my interest in a career in higher education.

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Senior Academic Leaders' Involvement in and Interpretation of the Presidential Transition Process at Private, Selective, Nonprofit Colleges and Universities: Analyzed Through an Organizational Decision-Making Framework

This study described, interpreted, and analyzed the way in which senior academic leaders were involved in the presidential transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities. This topic was important to study because senior academic leaders' interpretations of organizational decision-making provides insight into the way colleges and universities deal with tension between academic values and economic forces.

The study addressed one research question: What is the role of senior academic leaders (i.e., provost or vice president for academic affairs) in the various phases of the presidential transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities? There was one analytical question: How did the senior academic leaders describe the decision-making process during the various phases of the presidential transition process?

There is a lack of empirical research about presidential transition processes in higher education. This study, therefore, relied heavily on research from other discourses and narratives of practitioners. It connected literature about leadership transitions and the academic presidency in order to examine how the transition process can support a newly appointed president. This study was conducted using a basic interpretive design consistent with a constructivist research paradigm. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with 19 senior academic leaders from 19 different institutions.

The data were coded and analyzed to identify 10 themes consistent with the literature reviewed. The 19 participants described their experiences in three phases

(reflection, selection, and onboarding) of the presidential transition process. Participants reported being involved in the reflection phase of the process by leading and participating in planning processes. They reported serving as advocates for the academic program during the selection phase. The study also found that the role of senior academic leaders during the onboarding phase was to facilitate the development of relationships. The analysis was interpreted through the analytic framework of organizational decision-making. The study produced four findings, which indicated why decision-making processes were and were not present, identified tension between academic and market values during the transition, and showed how the transition process may affect a presidency. Recommendations were provided for practice and further research.

Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abstract of the Dissertation	vi
List of Tables	xiv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Challenges Facing Higher Education.....	1
Problem of Practice.....	5
Purpose and Research Questions	9
Analytical Framework	10
Statement of Potential Significance	12
Summary of Methodology	14
Delimitations.....	15
Limitations	17
Assumptions.....	18
Definition of Key Terms.....	20
Summary	22
Overview of Chapters	23
CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	24
The Transition Process.....	25
A Framework for Transition in Higher Education.....	26

Presidential Transition at Community Colleges	27
Leadership Transition at For-Profit Institutions.....	29
Leadership Succession at Government Agencies	30
Leadership Succession at Nonprofits.....	32
Transition Section Conclusion.....	34
The Nature of the Presidency in Higher Education	35
Complexity of the Job Role.....	35
Institutional Values and Culture	42
Social Match	47
Structural Authority in the Administrative Hierarchy	52
Theoretical/Analytical Framework: Decision Making	54
Decision-Making Models.....	55
Inferences for the Current Study.....	61
Application and Synthesis.....	62
Chapter Conclusion.....	63
 CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	 65
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	66
Research Design.....	67
Philosophical Assumptions	67
Qualitative Design.....	68
Procedures for Data Collection.....	69
Sampling	70
Interview Questions	73

Procedures for Data Analysis.....	77
Initial Organization	77
Data Coding	78
Development of Themes	78
Data Presentation	79
Trustworthiness Strategies	79
Reflexivity.....	82
Subjectivity Statement	82
Ethical Issues/Consideration of Human Subjects	85
Significance of the Study	86
Summary	86
 CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	 88
Participant Profile	91
Phase 1 of the Presidential Transition Process: Reflection.....	93
Theme 1: Senior Academic Leaders’ Involvement in Institutional Planning	
Processes During the Reflection Phase of the Presidential Transition Process	94
Theme 2: The Potential Impact of Formal Policy on the Presidential Transition	
Process	97
Summary of Participants’ Involvement in the Reflection Phase	100
Phase 2 of the Presidential Transition Process: Selection	101
Theme 3: Senior Academic Leaders’ Participation in the Presidential Search	
Committee	102
Theme 4: Senior Academic Leaders’ Informal Input to Formal Decision-Makers ...	105

Theme 5: Senior Academic Leaders’ Participation in Formal Interviews of Presidential Candidates.....	107
Theme 6: The Impact of Confidentiality Concerns on the Presidential Transition Process	108
Summary of Participants’ Involvement in the Selection Phase	117
Phase 3 of the Presidential Transition Process: Onboarding	117
Theme 7: The Role of Senior Academic Leaders in Facilitating Relationship Development	118
Theme 8: The Involvement of the Immediate Past President in the Presidential Transition Process	125
Theme 9: Senior Academic Leaders’ Status as Tenured Faculty Members and the Corresponding Ability to Speak Candidly About the Transition Process.....	128
Theme 10: Impact of the Presidential Transition Process on the Success of the Presidency	130
Summary of Participants’ Involvement in the Onboarding Phase	133
Evidence of Decision-Making Present During the Three Phases of the Presidential Transition Process	134
Summary of Findings.....	136
 CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	 138
Summary of Themes	139
Findings.....	140

Finding 1: Four Decision-Making Frames Are Present in the Presidential Transition Process	140
Finding 2: Three Frames Are Not Present in the Presidential Transition Process.....	152
Finding 3: Tension Between Market and Academic Values Is Present During the Presidential Transition Process	155
Finding 4: The Presidential Transition Process Has the Ability to Affect a Presidency	160
Conclusion of Findings	163
Discussion of Findings.....	164
Recommendations for Practice	167
Recommendation 1: The Reflection Phase Is an Opportunity to Solicit Extensive Input from Stakeholders	167
Recommendation 2: Institutions Should Evaluate Campus Policy when Conducting a Presidential Transition Process.....	169
Recommendation 3: Senior Academic Leaders Should Have the Opportunity to Formally Shape the Presidential Selection Process	170
Recommendation 4: Senior Academic Leaders Should Participate in Formal Interviews of Candidates.....	174
Recommendation 5: Leaders of the Transition Process Should Communicate Decisions Made During the Selection Process to Stakeholders.....	175
Recommendation 6: If Conducting an Open Search, Institutions Should Delay the Public Announcement of Candidates to Increase the Candidate Pool	176

Recommendation 7: Institutions Should Evaluate Their Cultures Before Conducting Presidential Transition Processes	176
Recommendation 8: Senior Academic Leaders and Newly Selected Presidents Should Prioritize Private Meeting Time to Discuss the Academic Program.....	177
Recommendation 9: Governing Boards Should Prevent the Sitting President from Unduly Influencing the Transition Process	178
Recommendations for Research	179
Summary and Conclusion.....	181
REFERENCES	183
APPENDIX A: Recruitment Email	190
APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol.....	191
APPENDIX C: Consent Form	193

List of Tables

	<u>Page</u>
2.1. Types of Organizational Decision-Making Models.....	11
3.1. Interview Questions	76
4.1. Study Themes.....	90
4.2. Participant Involvement in Phase 1: Reflection.....	93
4.3. Participant Involvement in Phase 2: Selection.....	102
4.4. Confidentiality Concerns	109
4.5. Participant Involvement in Phase 3: Onboarding	118
5.1. Study Themes.....	139
5.2. Decision-Making Frames Present During the Transition Process	141

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Challenges Facing Higher Education

Colleges and universities face numerous challenges. Increasing calls for accountability, inadequate public funding, changing demographics, increasing competition for gifts and prestige, and new methods of delivery are some of the top challenges (Association of Governing Boards [AGB], 2006). Private institutions face a unique set of challenges. Ehrenberg (2012) identified those challenges as rising tuition levels, increasing financial aid budgets, research funded increasingly by internal rather than external sources, and instructional budgets that capture a relatively small share of institutional budgets relative to almost every other category of expenditure. The way our campus leaders handle these concerns will affect how our educational institutions are able to promote the greater good through their teaching, research, and service missions.

The AGB (2006) linked campus leadership to the health of our society and wrote, “Facing these challenges is critical to creating the human and intellectual capital to ensure the nation’s continued social, civic, and economic well-being” (p. vi). Each of the challenges is in some way ameliorated by money. That money may come from additional students, auxiliary revenue, increased aid from state governments, or fundraising from alumni, parents, and friends. Rhoades and Slaughter (2004) noted that while colleges and universities have always been influenced by market forces, the “breadth and depth” of the impact market forces have on the behavior of leaders in higher education in the current environment is different than in years past (p. 37). The authors defined “academic capitalism in the new economy” as colleges and universities

“engaging in market and market-like behaviors” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004, p. 37). They argued that “today, higher education institutions are seeking to generate revenue from their core educational, research and service functions” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004, p. 37). This behavior is problematic as it leads to changes “that prioritize potential revenue generation, rather than the unfettered expansion of knowledge, in policy negotiations and strategic and academic decision-making” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004, p. 38). In short, Rhoades and Slaughter (2004) argued that economic pressures impact decision-making by leaders at colleges and universities.

Bortz (1998) interviewed presidents and board chairs of nine liberal arts colleges and found evidence of angst about economic challenges facing higher education. The goal of the study was to “investigate the leadership of a select group of liberal arts colleges, their perceptions about current issues in higher education, and how the leaders communicate about the issues to establish policy and provide a common vision for the college community” (Bortz, 1998, p. i). Each president and board chair participant interviewed was asked, “What do you believe is the single greatest challenge your college faces at this time?” (Bortz, 1998, p. 194). The response was troubling, if not surprising. Bortz (1998) found that “all of the answers, with the exception of one, concerned the financial health of the institution. No one responded with an academic issue as the one for which they had greatest concern” (p. 151). The fact that 17 of the 18 leaders interviewed had the same concern adds to the finding’s credence.

The angst about the economic pressures facing higher education has not subsided since this research was conducted. A recent survey of 3,131 college and university leaders (with 846 responses) across all sectors of higher education found similar levels of

concern about the financial footing of their institutions; the authors found just 48% of leaders at private nonprofit colleges agreed or strongly agreed when asked the following question, “I am confident about the sustainability of my institution’s financial model over the next ten years” (Jaschik & Lederman, 2014, p. 13). The concern about economic challenges facing colleges and universities leads to a prioritization of behaviors that focus on these challenges as opposed to other challenges facing the institution, as Rhoades and Slaughter (2004) argued. This concern was confirmed in the study by Jaschik and Lederman (2014), who found that 53% of college and university presidents who responded to this survey posited that “most new spending at their institution in the coming years will come from reallocated dollars rather than an increase in net revenue” (Jaschik & Lederman, 2014, p. 15). This finding indicates that financial pressure leads to competition for scarce resources on a college or university campus, causing tension.

Both Gumport (2000) and Kezar (2004) expressed concern about the increasing tendency of higher education to behave like an industry and demonstrate behaviors that lead to a lack of legitimacy of the academic endeavor. Kezar (2004) argued that the result of this new relationship “appears to be that the charter between higher education and society is being rewritten” (p. 431). Kezar (2004) posited that the public traditionally expects higher education to educate future citizens, create new knowledge, provide access to a broad range of students to ensure social mobility, and create partnerships with other social services. Kezar (2004) was concerned that if the charter were rewritten, colleges and universities would focus on “predominantly economic goals and market-oriented values” at the expense of those other important things higher education provides to society (p. 430).

Labaree (1997) identified three primary goals of our system of higher education: democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. As a result of those goals, Labaree (1997) argued that “schools, it seems, occupy an awkward position at the intersection between what we hope society will become and what we think it really is, between political ideals and economic realities” (p. 41). The actions needed to meet each of these goals on an institutional level may be incongruent. Efforts to pursue all of these goals at the same time may lead to tension (Labaree, 1997). The economic challenges our colleges and universities currently face may further exacerbate that tension. Those challenges encourage more people to pursue higher education, while colleges and universities operate with fewer resources.

Former Harvard University President Derek Bok described the consequences of tension created as a result of increased behavior that succumbs to economic forces. Bok’s (2003) chief concern was not simply that professors feel their work is being devalued but rather that the actual academic enterprise at our colleges and universities is being shortchanged. As a result, students and our economy suffer because students do not get the education they need while our society receives college graduates with the credential but not the skill set needed to perform needed functions in the current economy. Bok (2003) wrote about the costs of commercialization: “More often, they have to do with the elusive world of values, and specifically, with the principles that ought to guide academic pursuits and thereby enhance their quality and meaning” (pp. 105-106). He specifically stated that the consequences of these behaviors include the undermining of academic values, damage to the academic community, and risks to institutional reputation (Bok, 2003). These negative consequences occur when those in

positions of authority make decisions that value economic success over the academic mission. Examples include funding for commercially viable research with little academic value rather than research valued by the academic community, a decline in academic collegiality when professors feel undervalued when those who work in athletics or fundraising receive salaries that far outpace those received by academics, and a risk to reputation when a student athlete is accepted to the institution because of his or her athletic prowess despite academic deficiencies (Bok, 2003).

As a result of this tension in the current environment in higher education, colleges and universities must make decisions about how and what to prioritize and value. The tension causes colleges and universities to prioritize. Those priorities may change because of economic challenges. The next section of this chapter describes how the tension manifests itself on a college or university campus. It also describes how and why the transition of college and university presidents may or may not exacerbate the tension.

Problem of Practice

Institutional governance is important to study because the way in which colleges and universities experience these economic challenges may provide insight into the way those institutions are attempting to adapt in this current environment. The AGB (2006) report on the state of the presidency in U.S. higher education argued that colleges and universities face so many challenges to developing and sustaining effective good leadership that we are in a “governance crisis” (p. vi). Within all facets of higher education governance, the academic presidency is especially important to study because the president is the symbolic and substantive leader of the institution. The AGB (2006) wrote, “The president has primary responsibility for increasing public understanding and

support for the institution . . . and must lead the institution as it confronts new external challenges” (p. vi). The president is expected to be the representative of all stakeholder groups and must tie those divergent views together in order to move the school forward and out of that “awkward intersection” of expectations, interpretations, and realities that Labaree (1997, p. 41) described. The president must work to understand the concerns of all stakeholder groups and develop a unified plan of action. McLaughlin (1996) stated that the president is a representative of the institution like no other and therefore is the singular figure in the organizational hierarchy to tie the various stakeholder groups together.

Choosing a new president is a major institutional decision because it requires an institution to look inward, prioritize goals, and identify a new leader who will work with those on and off campus to make those goals a reality (AGB, 2006). The president serves as a link between what the institution hopes to be internally and how it is perceived externally. The selection of a new president codifies those institutional hopes, and the new president is expected to bring a skill set and experiences to help the college or university meet those goals (Birnbaum, 1988b). The transition process of a new president can impact relationships between the president and stakeholder groups and ultimately the success of a presidency (McLaughlin, 1996).

The way in which stakeholder groups are involved in decision-making processes, like the presidential transition process, is important to study because it may describe how institutions are responding to challenges. Stakeholder groups in higher education include faculty members, trustees, students, alumni, staff members, parents, and local community members. Community members from all stakeholder groups in a college or university

who participate in the process may hope the president will symbolize certain things and make decisions to move the institution in a particular direction (Birnbaum, 1988b).

Those hopes are placed on the person selected for the office. The selection of a president with a particular background sends a signal to the rest of the academic community about the direction of the institution. McLaughlin (1996) wrote, “The president speaks not as an individual but as the representative of the institution. . . . Presidents serve as the ‘living logo’ of their institution” and, as such, “the president is the institution” and stakeholders may place hopes and expectations for the institution on the shoulders of the president (p. 8).

To ensure that some stakeholders do not feel excluded, the presidential transition process must deliberately focus on including as many groups as possible. Exclusion from decision-making may adversely affect the relationship between those in and out of power. McLaughlin (1996) stated, “A critically important task of the presidential transition is the development of relationships with key institutional players. . . . In higher education, relationships are the coin of the realm” (p. 12). Birnbaum (1988b) concurred with McLaughlin (1996) and argued that the outcome of a presidential search is less important than the process because the process “provides people with a sense of participating in important decisions” (p. 506). The presidential transition is an especially important institutional decision, as it is a display of institutional priorities developed after a time of institutional reflection. Stakeholder involvement in the organizational decisions surrounding the presidential transition may facilitate relationships with the new president and ultimately collective understanding and acceptance of institutional priorities. The

way in which stakeholder groups and academic stakeholders are involved in the transition process is therefore crucial to study.

The views of faculty members are especially important to consider because they are responsible for the academic enterprise, which is the primary mission of our colleges and universities. According to Gumpert (2000), Bok (2003), and Kezar (2004), tension exists between those academic values and economic forces because of the environmental pressures facing colleges and universities. Faculty members deal with this tension as part of their professional lives. Senior academic leaders sit at the intersection of these competing forces and may have unique insights into the way this tension influences institutional decision-making. Senior academic leaders are symbolic and substantive leaders of academic programs at their respective institutions. These leaders may be part of institutional budgeting meetings and would be in a position to advocate for the academic program and understand why an additional budget line may go to the development office or admissions rather than an academic program. A decision like this may frustrate the academic, but the administrator may know that those positions are revenue enhancing. A position in the administrative hierarchy provides senior academic leaders with a unique perspective. They may understand how an administrative decision may impact the academic program. That view allows them to communicate those consequences to both the faculty and administration.

When stakeholder groups are not involved in the presidential transition process to the degree that they could be, the new president may forgo the chance to develop important relationships and receive the support for initiatives or decisions needed to move the institution in a particular direction. Without that support, the president may not

be effective or may be removed. One recent example of a presidential transition worthy of examination occurred at Winthrop University. Winthrop went through two presidential transition processes in 3 years and vowed to make changes leading to a more successful presidency. A reporter for *The Charlotte Observer* wrote that as the school searched for a second president within 3 years, several board members “say the opinions of school employees will hold more significance in the Board of Trustees’ decision this time around” (Douglas, 2014, para. 1). As the transition processes were reviewed, board members acknowledged that “some faculty members identified—before the president was hired—issues . . . that later became board concerns and led to [the] firing of the president” (Douglas, 2014, para. 2). During this transition process, the vice chair of the board stated that faculty and staff views of the finalists should “percolate to the top” of board deliberations (Douglas, 2014, para. 3). This situation provides an example of the way the transition process can aid in the development of relationships between a new president and stakeholders.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to describe, interpret, and analyze the way in which senior academic leaders were involved in the presidential transition process. The study addressed one research question: What is the role of senior academic leaders (i.e., provost or vice president for academic affairs) in all phases of the presidential transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities? There was one analytical question: How did the senior academic leaders (i.e., provost, vice president for academic affairs) describe the decision-making process during the various phases of the presidential transition process?

Describing and analyzing senior academic leaders' involvement with and experience of the presidential transition process provides additional insight into how colleges and universities are dealing with the challenges facing higher education. The transition process is a time of institutional reflection and decision-making that can further relationships between the institution and its leaders and external constituencies (AGB, 2006). Studying the experiences of senior academic leaders through an organizational decision-making framework contributes to practice by identifying times in the process when practitioners can incorporate the concerns of academic leaders and other stakeholders into the decision-making process at a college or university.

Analytical Framework

The study interpreted and analyzed the experiences of senior academic leaders during the presidential transition process through identified organizational decision-making models. Bess and Dee (2012) described decision-making as a complex process designed to develop a solution to a problem in hopes of building a common course of action. Bess and Dee (2012) argued that the complexity of the decision is based on the unit of analysis, the nature of the problem, qualities of the decision-maker, qualities of the followers, organizational conditions, and the nature of the decision. A college or university may use a wide range of organizational decision-making models. The model selected and how it is incorporated provide insight into the way an organization is attempting to deal with a real or perceived issue or concern.

The types of organizational decision-making models include bureaucratic, collegial, cultural, garbage can, intuition, political, and rational, as summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1
Types of Organizational Decision-Making Models

Model	Description
Bureaucratic	Is driven by goals and led by hierarchical authority, ultimately leading to centralization of control, standardization, and legitimacy (Pusser, 2003).
Collegial	Is based on “collective action and widely shared values” (Pusser, 2003, p. 123); thorough and deliberate, with an attempt to reach consensus and a view of participants as equals who have influence in the decision-making process (Birnbaum, 1988a).
Cultural	Gives an “understanding of how seemingly unconnected acts and events fall into place,” which provides an academic leader an understanding of stakeholder group interpretations (Tierney, 2008, p. 6). With this understanding, academic leaders can communicate more effectively in hopes of moving the community together in a common direction. Culture is “the unseen but experienced and felt ambience of an organization that includes a large variety of norms about work and other behavior or organizational members” (Bess & Dee, 2012, p. 465).
Garbage can	Views “problems and solutions [as] attached to choices, and thus to each other, not because of any means-ends linkage but because of their temporal proximity” (March, 1994, p. 200).
Intuition	Involves “skill in recognizing those things that have become familiar through past experience” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 11); is closely associated with the “phenomenon of recognition” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 11).
Political	Has elements of bargaining, coalition building, and negotiations between interests; requires leaders to serve as “boundary spanners, key actors who mediate, or articulate, between internal and external constituencies” (Pusser, 2003, p. 124).
Rationality	Provides decision-makers with reasons that inform both their choices and the “justifications for their choices” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 7); provides a “basis for predicting both behavior and explanations of behavior” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 7).

Decision-making is a useful framework through which to evaluate the experiences of senior academic leaders because it provides insight about dynamics between stakeholders. Bess and Dee (2012) described critical interpretations of decision-making and argued that power and equity are associated with decision-making and that “in higher education organizations, values frequently come to the fore” (p. 589). Analyzing who makes decisions, and stakeholder groups’ interpretations of the decision and decision-making process, may provide insight into the specific concerns of those stakeholders.

That perspective helps organize the various interpretations of participants and further the coding and theming process. As an example of the way a decision-making framework may lead us to better understand stakeholder group dynamics, faculty members may think additional time and funding to conduct research should be the top institutional priority. Board members may think balancing the budget and ensuring the institution's economic viability are the top priorities. Analyzing the decision-making process that identifies a leader and codifies priorities may tell us how institutions are attempting to deal with issues facing our colleges and universities. The way groups are involved in aspects of institutional life can help or hinder the ability to develop relationships. The building of relationships is an important part of the presidential transition process (McLaughlin, 1996). The way senior academic leaders experience the decision-making process during the phases of the presidential transition—reflection, selection and onboarding—therefore warrants study because it provides insight about the processes that help the new president develop relationships with stakeholder groups.

Statement of Potential Significance

Little empirical research exists on the presidential transition process in higher education according to McLaughlin (1996) and Stanley and Betts (2004). Kezar and Eckel (2004) identified a lack of literature on higher education governance in general. The literature that does exist about presidential transitions in higher education is largely narrative description by practitioners and is not empirical. This study adds to the literature in three ways. First, it provides additional empirical work about the presidential transition process in higher education, as it specifically analyzes and interprets the experiences of one stakeholder group with the phases of the presidential transition

process. Second, the study analyzes the views and experiences of one stakeholder group across multiple locations. Much of the other work reviews multiple stakeholder views at a single location. Third, the study provides additional insight into the literature on organizational decision-making at institutions of higher education, as it applies the identified models to decision-making processes in higher education. Specifically, this study identified the decision-making models used at the institutions of participants and described the models preferred by the senior academic leaders in the study.

Studying decision-making during the phases of the presidential transition process (reflection, selection and onboarding) is important because these decisions may impact all facets of institutional life symbolically and substantively. The presidential transition is a time of organizational reflection about institutional needs and goals where voices of all stakeholder groups are incorporated (AGB, 2006). The study also adds insight into the way in which tensions between academic values and economic forces play out on a college or university campus during a decision-making process and the way decision-making in that environment may impact relationships between the new president and stakeholder groups.

The use of an organizational decision-making framework to study the presidential transition process sheds light on how the institution faces challenges. As an example, the use of a bureaucratic decision-making model indicates that decision-makers feel the need to move quickly in a dynamic environment. The use of a cultural or collegial decision-making model indicates the organization has a desire to ensure institutional values drive major organizational decisions. This analytical framework provides insight into the factors driving decision-making.

The audience for these findings is senior administrators who work behind the scenes to develop a process surrounding the selection and onboarding of a new president. This study provides recommendations for those who determine the individuals and groups who craft the job announcement, cull initial applicants, interview finalists, choose a finalist, and then develop a process for providing the new president with information and experiences to successfully start a presidency. Each part of the larger transition process comes about as a result of a decision-making process.

Summary of Methodology

A basic interpretive qualitative study was used to conduct this research. Merriam (2009) indicated that “qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make meaning of their lives and their worlds. . . . The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret those meanings” (p. 24). The goal of this research was to describe, interpret, and analyze the experiences of senior academic leaders during the presidential transition process. A basic interpretive design was appropriate for this research, as a basic qualitative study provided the structure to analyze the experiences of the participants.

To collect the needed data, 19 senior academic leaders who participated in a recent presidential transition process were interviewed over the telephone. To recruit participants, weekly publications that reported on higher education news were searched to identify presidential transitions that have taken place over the past 2 to 3 years at selective, nonprofit, private colleges and universities. Examples of publications used included *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*. Senior academic leaders at those institutions during the phases of the transition process were identified.

The institution's website, local papers, and national publications were reviewed to inform the researcher prior to the phone interviews.

After the interviews were conducted, data were coded or aggregated “into small categories of information . . . assigning a label” to the information (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). Codes were then analyzed for “recurring patterns or themes,” and findings were interpreted through relevant literature about the college presidency, the leadership transition process, environmental changes in higher education, and organizational decision-making theories (Merriam, 2009, pp. 23-24). The information was presented by providing an “in-depth picture of the [cases] using narrative, tables and figures” where appropriate (Creswell, 2013, p. 191). The rich, thick descriptions based on the analysis provide the reader with “generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases” (Creswell, 2013, p. 200).

Delimitations

This study collected data through semistructured interviews from senior academic leaders who experienced a presidential transition no more than three academic years from the time of the interview. Participants who experienced the process over that time period were included to ensure a large enough sample size. Interviewing participants shortly after the process occurred was considered ideal, as their memories would be fresh and their experiences would not be tainted positively or negatively by long-term interactions with the new president after the transition process concluded.

The research was also delimited to private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities. The institutions studied were similar in the size and scope of their academic offerings, teaching missions, and reliance on tuition and/or private gifts to fund the

enterprise. Because these institutions were privately funded, they did not face pressures from state legislatures and state executives when making major institutional decisions.

Senior academic leaders were chosen for this study for a number of reasons. First, these leaders were in substantive and symbolic positions. They represented academic interests on campus and could be easily identified. Other senior leaders in administrative roles may have been more instrumental in the presidential transition process, but it was not apparent which of those senior leaders were responsible for leading the administrative aspects of the process. It would not be readily apparent that any group of administrative leaders had a similar experience or represented a particular group of interests during the process. Second, there is noted tension between academic values and economic realities, as pointed out by Gumpert (2000), Kezar (2004), and Labaree (1997). The experiences of senior academic leaders during such an important decision-making process were therefore considered an important topic of study. The way in which they were involved provides additional insight into the way economic realities and academic values coexist on a campus.

The study provides additional insight into the dynamics at play between the various stakeholder groups and the interests they represent. The senior academic leaders may or may not have represented the views and experiences of the rest of the academic community during the process. Similarly, the decision-making process used during the presidential transition process may or may not have been representative of other decision-making processes. Questions incorporated in the interview protocol were designed to gauge the way the processes were or were not similar to other decision-making processes experienced by the senior academic leaders.

Limitations

Data for this study were limited to information provided by the senior academic leaders. The leaders may have had personal or professional reasons for sharing only a piece of their experience. The desire to move into a senior-level position elsewhere or to protect a person or group may have prevented participants from sharing their experiences fully, limiting the completeness of the analysis.

Another limitation of the study was that it did not incorporate the views of other campus leaders like senior student affairs officials, senior administrative officers, and leaders of the board of trustees. As a result, this study was unable to develop a full understanding of the dynamic between academic values and economic realities during a decision-making process. Because no interviews were conducted with other stakeholders, the extent to which other campus leaders shared the participants' interpretation of the process was not captured or analyzed. No contrasting views that may challenge or put those experiences into context were provided. No information about external factors that might influence the experience of the senior academic leaders was provided. Appropriate documents such as local and campus newspaper articles, institutional websites, and publications that reported on higher education at large were reviewed prior to the interviews to identify any specific issues or incidents the institution may have been dealing with that would have impacted the experience of the senior academic leader. Interview protocols took into account the possible factors that influenced the experiences of senior academic leaders.

This study also faced limitations related to the research design. Because interviews were conducted over the phone rather than in person, the participants may

have been less forthcoming. In addition, it was not possible to read body language or other cues that could signal the need for follow-up questions. Before the research was conducted, there was concern that the way the questions were sequenced may influence participant responses. To mitigate this concern, the research built on the work of Keeney (2012) and ensured questions about decision-making were asked in an order that would prevent the participant from developing preconceived assumptions that would influence responses to other questions. Specifically, questions asked about bureaucratic and rational decision-making were asked at the end of the interview protocol to ensure participants did not assume there was a correct answer.

Finally, the size of this study does not allow it to be generalizable. Creswell (2013) described qualitative analysis as research that “might focus on a few key issues, not for generalizing beyond the case but for understanding the complexity of the case” (p. 101). This research did not seek to accurately and definitively describe and interpret the experiences of all senior academic leaders during the various phases of the presidential transition process. However, this research provided an accurate description of the experiences of the participants and is therefore valuable, as other researchers or practitioners may use the analysis as they deem appropriate.

Assumptions

Because this study was conducted at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities, the researcher worked from an assumption that private institutions face similar environmental pressures associated with relying on tuition and fundraising to stay financially solvent. Private colleges and universities also have the ability to construct their own goals about academic offerings and admissions policies in a way public

colleges and universities do not. That freedom allows the various stakeholder groups at private institutions to have more decision-making authority. It was also assumed that state politicians, state higher education governing or coordinating boards, and government officials are involved in the presidential transition process at public institutions, which makes the processes at private and public colleges and universities fundamentally different.

The researcher assumed that a senior academic leader in place during a presidential transition at a college or university had some involvement in some phase or all phases of the presidential transition process. The interviews revealed that participants led sessions that solicited input about the needs and goals of the institution during the initial phase where the college or university reflected on its needs. Participants also played a large role in providing the newly selected president with a description of issues and needs related to the academic mission of the institution. A private college or university may have particular bylaws based on historical or religious affiliations that prescribe the processes for selecting a new president.

Another assumption was that the decision-making process leading to the selection of a president is socially constructed. This assumption was made because no two presidential transition processes have the same characteristics or outcomes. In each case, stakeholder groups are involved and have certain desires and expectations. Those in power make decisions that set the rules and parameters of the process. Those in power build a framework for making the decision about the selection of a president based on their interpretation of the challenges and needs of the institution. Stakeholder voices are added or excluded as those responsible ultimately construct and interpret those views

based on the decision-making model established. Participants did confirm that those in various groups wanted the president to represent different priorities while in office. Research also supported the assumption that the president is conferred additional authority and legitimacy when initially selected because he or she represents the movement of the institution towards particular goals, pleasing some and frustrating others.

It was assumed those stakeholder groups involved in the phases of the presidential transition process had additional influence in relation to stakeholder groups not involved in the process and that those who managed the decision-making process had even greater influence on the decision-making apparatus. This view was based on an understanding that those influencing the presidential selection process had additional power to then propose and implement solutions to prioritize challenges the institution faced. The veracity of these assumptions was not confirmed because senior academic leaders did not construct the transition processes and could not therefore describe which stakeholders influenced the decision-makers.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are used throughout this dissertation:

Academic values. For the purposes of this study, academic values are those defined by Kezar (2004), which “relate to the historic mission of fostering democracy and . . . equality, academic freedom, [and] the pursuit of knowledge” (p. 430).

Basic qualitative methodology. In this research study design, the researcher interprets the way “individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” and is “interested in (1) how people interpret experiences, (2) how they construct their

worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. . . . The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 22-23).

Constructivism. This worldview applied to research believes that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences. . . . These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views. . . . The goal of the research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 24-25). Creswell (2013) continued, “Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. . . . They are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others . . . and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (p. 25).

Decision-making. Decision-making is the process of identifying problems and associated solutions leading to a course of action (Bess & Dee, 2012).

Economic forces/realities. For the purposes of this study, the economic forces/realities that colleges and universities must deal with when making decisions are defined by the AGB (2006) as intense global competition, rapid technological advancements, demographic shifts, increasing demand for both education and training, new delivery methods, increasing calls for accountability, and inadequate funding to meet societal needs.

Senior academic leader: For the purposes of this study, the senior academic leader is the institution's senior academic officer. This official may have the title of provost or vice president for academic affairs.

Stakeholders. Stakeholders are those entities in an environment that are impacted or have concern about the actions of the organization (Bess & Dee, 2012).

Transition process. For the purposes of this study, the transition process begins when one leader announces his or her departure from the position, followed by a period of organizational reflection and decision-making leading to the selection of a new institutional leader. The process continues while a new leader is provided with information to educate him or her about the institution and position.

Summary

Tension between academic values and economic realities exists at many institutions of higher education as a result of many pressures. The presidential transition process is important to study because it is a major symbolic and substantive institutional decision. This study described the way in which senior academic leaders were involved in the presidential transition process and how those leaders interpreted the way their institutions came to major organizational decisions. The research is valuable as it adds additional information about decision-making on college and university campuses and the development of a presidential transition process that helps develop relationships between the new president and stakeholder groups.

Overview of Chapters

This chapter has provided a statement of the problem, a rationale for the study, and a description of the parameters of the research. Chapter 2 reviews literature associated with leadership transition processes in higher education, government, for-profit organizations, and nonprofit organizations. The analytic framework used to perform the analysis is reviewed, as well as the nature of the academic presidency. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to perform the research. Chapter 4 presents the 10 themes found in the research. Participants indicated that they were involved in the transition process by leading planning processes, providing input to decision-makers, and facilitating the development of relationships. Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the themes in relation to the research and analytical questions posed in chapter 1. The four findings address the use of decision-making models, the presence of tension between academic and administrative values during the process, and the process's ability to support a presidency.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The involvement of senior academic leaders in all phases of the presidential transition process and their interpretation of the organizational decision-making processes used in the transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities was described and analyzed in this study. The research question was: What is the role of senior academic leaders (i.e., provost or vice president for academic affairs) in the phases of the presidential transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities? The analytical question was: How did the senior academic leaders (i.e., provost or vice president for academic affairs) describe the decision-making process during the various phases of the presidential transition process?

According to Gumpert (2000), Bok (2003), and Kezar (2004), tension between academic values and economic realities exists at many institutions of higher education as a result of the pressures facing higher education. The presidential transition process is a major symbolic and substantive institutional decision (Birnbaum, 1988b). Studying how major decisions were made and which stakeholder groups were involved in the process can provide insight into the ways colleges and universities are attempting to deal with this tension. The research is valuable, as it sheds light on decision-making on college and university campuses. This research also informs practice surrounding presidential transition processes.

The literature discussed in this chapter was collected through a review of the major academic journals focused on higher education, including the *Journal of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, and *The Review of Higher Education*. The

researcher also reviewed available dissertations, and those findings mirrored the other literature reviewed. Little empirical work has been conducted on the presidential transition process in higher education according to McLaughlin (1996) and Stanley and Betts (2004). This lack of literature stems from a scarcity of research on institutional governance, of which the academic presidency and the presidential transition process are fundamental parts. Kezar and Eckel (2004) specifically identified a lack of scholarship on governance and associated processes along with human dynamics that impact governance. The dearth of literature on the subject may be a response to the great deal of autobiographical literature on the college presidency. Many long-serving or prominent former presidents have published books about their experiences. Because so much of this autobiographical work exists, researchers may have chosen to focus their work on other subjects without autobiographical or empirical treatment. The autobiographical work that does exist has extensive rich, thick description despite its lack of empirical grounding. This study used research found in journals that focused on business, organizational theory, government, and nonprofit administration.

The chapter focuses on the literature on the leadership transition process, the nature of the academic presidency, and attempts to connect the two bodies of literature to examine ways the presidential transition process can support a newly appointed academic president. That information is followed by a description of the analytical framework, decision making.

The Transition Process

This section reviews literature about leadership transitions in higher education in addition to those in nonprofit institutions, for-profit institutions, and government

agencies. The literature review extended to transitions outside of higher education because of the lack of empirical research on presidential transition processes in higher education (McLaughlin, 1996; Stanley & Betts, 2004) and higher education governance processes in general (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). In addition, the inclusion of different contexts allowed for the examination of similarities and differences in the nature and mechanics of leadership transition processes across all sectors and the identification of particular aspects of transition that can better inform the presidential transition processes at colleges and universities. Studies conducted within multiple environments were analyzed against the model provided by the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) in 2006.

A Framework for Transition in Higher Education

The AGB Task Force on the State of the Presidency in Higher Education sought to outline the distinct roles of presidents, boards, and faculty members on a college or university campus in order to define the characteristics of a successful academic presidency. This report sought to establish a common understanding of a successful academic presidency. Seventeen prominent practitioners produced the report, including current and former college and university presidents, leaders of state systems of higher education, a governing board member, and one former state governor. *The Report of the AGB Task Force on the State of the Presidency in American Higher Education: The Leadership Imperative* stated that a successful academic president will exert leadership that “links the president, the faculty, and the board together in a well-functioning partnership purposefully devoted to a well-defined, broadly affirmed institutional vision” (AGB, 2006, p. vii). It also argued that there is a connection between successful

presidential leadership and the development of relationships between the president and stakeholders.

To identify and select a president who can establish positive relationships, the AGB Task Force laid out recommendations for boards going through the transition process. Those recommendations centered on developing a full understanding of the institution's needs and ensuring all involved were committed to that common vision for the institution, while developing a process viewed as fair and legitimate (AGB, 2006).

This report offered a specific understanding of the facets of a successful presidency and presidential transition, developed and endorsed by a large and wide-ranging group of higher education practitioners working towards the goal of improving higher education governance. This report was used as a framework in this research and provided a lens to assess how practitioners would be supported by the development of particular practices in a transition process. It also grounded the review of transition processes in other disciplines and provided an evaluative framework across the differing sectors.

Presidential Transition at Community Colleges

The presidential transition process has been studied in community colleges. Employing a qualitative case study methodology, Levin (1998) examined the presidential transition process at five community colleges that ranged in size and were located in different settings (urban, rural, and suburban). At each institution, Levin interviewed the chief executive officer, at least three administrators, at least four faculty members, and another individual in a leadership role (i.e., department chair, chair of the senate) (Levin, 1998, pp. 408-409). Levin also met informally with other faculty, administrators, and

support staff. His goal was to analyze how those in community colleges “interpreted organizational life [and] their explanations for organizational change” (Levin, 1998, p. 409). Levin (1998) found that presidential succession was a major factor in organizational change at these institutions because, he posited, the environment and associated culture may be more accepting of hierarchical authority, as presidents may have more authority at these institutions than in others.

Levin’s use of a qualitative methodology was appropriate as he sought to capture the interpretation of those who experienced a transition process. The fact that he was able to draw such a strong conclusion while conducting research at community colleges in different environments (urban, rural, and suburban) added to the trustworthiness of the findings. The trustworthiness of the findings would have been enhanced if he had conducted research at more sites and clearly listed those he met with at each institution to ensure consistency across the five campuses studied.

Based on Levin’s (1998) findings and analysis, institutions that exhibit certain characteristics of a community college—e.g., those with fewer tenured faculty members, a more hierarchical management structure, or less concern about rankings and national name recognition—may be more likely to be influenced by a presidential transition. Conversely, schools with national name recognition, a large proportion of tenured faculty, and a management structure that spreads leadership and decision-making across the institution may be less influenced by presidential transition because decision-making is more widely dispersed. At an institution with a high proportion of tenured faculty, there is an expectation that faculty do extensive research. Each faculty member is then responsible for connecting, in some way, with external constituents. Those external

constituents provide feedback, critique, and funding for that research. At a school without that research focus, a higher proportion of decisions would focus on internal issues. An administrator, including a president, may have a greater ability to influence internal operations. As a result, stakeholders at a less research-intensive institution may be more impacted by a presidential transition than would those at more research-intensive institutions where much of the funding and research discourse takes place in academic arenas that span multiple institutions. This study explained why a transition may be important. The study of leadership transitions in other contexts may also shed light on how a transition process may impact a college or university.

Leadership Transition at For-Profit Institutions

The for-profit leadership transition process was also considered in this study. In the for-profit context, the measure of success may be very clear, while in higher education there is not a single definition of success (Fleming, 2010). Chung and Luo (2012) studied the impact of leadership transition on firm performance in emerging economies. They studied 573 Taiwanese firms between 1996 and 2005, using inferential statistics to compare firms' performance (Chung & Luo, 2012). The dependent variable was return on assets and the independent variable was successor origin, which the authors characterized as a personal or professional relationship that would provide additional understanding of any aspect of the firm (Chung & Luo, 2012).

Chung and Luo (2012) posited at the outset of their research that “the alignment between successor origin and the specific social context in which firms are embedded benefits post-succession firm performance” (p. 7). They had a working thesis that those leaders who had standing relationships with aspects of the firm would lead their firms to

better performance. Their research found that “successors’ access to social networks and the legitimacy conferred by important stakeholders are crucial to their ability to garner resources and support, which in turn benefits firm profitability” (Chung & Luo, 2012, p. 30).

This study was different than others studying the leadership transition process because it used quantitative measures. While it found a relationship between successor origin and firm success, it did not explain why or discuss the experiences of those involved. This study’s methodology would not apply to the context of higher education because there is not a singular metric that indicates success for a college or university. Similarly, there is not a singular metric that could be used to evaluate the performance of a college or university president. Qualitative measures may be especially useful in the study of leadership transitions and relationships because they capture the interpretations of those who experience the transition. They can provide more insight into the importance of relationships, which could then offer practitioners a better understanding of how to approach certain issues.

While there are obvious differences between firm performance in Taiwan and the success of a college or university as a result of presidential performance, the study of Chung and Luo (2012) offers more empirical support in a different context for the argument that relationships between the leader of an organization and stakeholders are important for institutional success.

Leadership Succession at Government Agencies

Governmental agencies share many traits with some colleges and universities and can therefore add to the understanding of presidential transitions at private, nonprofit

colleges and universities. Both governmental and higher education institutions have multiple missions and external stakeholders, which can lead to an environment producing numerous and conflicting goals (Fleming, 2010). Both types of institutions rarely can identify a single metric that captures positive performance in the way for-profit companies do. The types of organizations differ in funding sources. Because nearly all private, nonprofit colleges and universities rely on tuition dollars to operate, they must constantly work to attract students and private support, and economic realities may be more likely to impact the decision-making process. Governmental agencies, of course, receive their funding based on the decision-making of elected political officials.

Two top executives at the Food and Drug Administration wrote a case study on their experiences developing an agency plan shortly after being appointed to their positions (Young & Norris, 1988). They found multiple issues that needed to be addressed during a leadership transition: the disproportionate amount of time and energy employees spent on transition issues compared to normal duties; a more rigid hierarchical structure focused on tasks as opposed to larger goals; patterns of centralization of authority on the part of new leaders, which were not easily changed; a breakdown in the channels of communication, leading to a decrease in effective communication; and a focus on personal interests over those of the organization (Young & Norris, 1988, p. 564). Despite the challenges, the authors found that the planning process was a productive experience. It provided a number of benefits and helped mitigate the traditional concerns of leadership transitions. The benefits included helping direct energies in positive directions, counteracting the tendency towards centralization of authority, fostering constructive communication between appointed executives and career

employees, serving as an effective orientation tool for new executives, and improving budgeting and resource allocation (Young & Norris, 1988).

This study found that the transition process may impact stakeholder group interactions and illustrated how the transition process continues to take place after a new leader is selected. During the transition period, the new leader is responsible for communicating a new vision and making sense of the feelings and experiences of stakeholders. The ability to develop relationships during the transition process may allow a new president to communicate more easily in future interactions with stakeholders. Improved communication may help a new leader identify problems and solutions while developing common goals for the institution.

The authors used a case study methodology, showing that when studying the transition process it is important to understand how the transition process impacts stakeholders in a particular context. The study would have provided additional insight if it had involved additional sites.

Leadership Succession at Nonprofits

Balser and Carmin (2009) studied transition at one nonprofit organization, utilizing a case study involving semistructured interviews with 14 staff members, administrators, board members, and volunteers. Their goal was to study the various views and analyze potential conflict during the process. The study found that the transition process can “expose latent disagreement about an organization’s identity and give rise to internal conflict” (Balser & Carmin, 2009, p. 185). In addition, the transition process “requires sensitivity to employees’ interpretations of organizational identity, the extent to which these interpretations are collectively shared, and how proposed changes

may be regarded by different subgroups as threats to organizational identity” (Balser & Carmin, 2009, p. 186). Balser and Carmin (2009) concluded that the transition process may be difficult for all types of organizations, but especially organizations driven by their missions and values.

This research suggests that some colleges and universities may be more prone than others to internal conflict about organizational identity as identified during a leadership transition. Because of their smaller and more fluid nature, many nonprofits may have a greater opportunity for organizational change and therefore identity threats during such a time period. This study provides more evidence that leadership transition is a time of reflection about the organization’s mission and values. As a result, it is especially important to gain insights from all stakeholder groups, as all will be impacted by the change. Having those conversations provides stakeholders with a chance to voice their opinions about the direction of the institution. This provides the new leader with an understanding of issues to be dealt with. These relationships developed by communication help focus the efforts of the new leader on the work deemed important by those doing the work of the organization while earning buy-in from those workers to a coherent larger vision. These findings may be transferable to the institutions selected in my study, as those colleges and universities have made decisions to provide a limited number of programs compared to their large research counterparts. When an institution limits programs, it makes a value judgment that shapes the institution’s identity. Those who choose to attend or work at the institution therefore believe in the mission of the institution and are less likely to be open to a change in the organization’s identity. The

authors' use of the case study methodology showed the value they placed on the interpretations of stakeholders.

Transition Section Conclusion

Each of the four environments described the link between the success of a new leader, the development of relationships with stakeholders, and the way a transition process can facilitate the building of those relationships. As such, the studies reviewed in this section are aligned with the assertions made by the AGB. The AGB's (2006) recommendation that search processes proceed from organizational need and be united around an institutional vision was supported by the research of Balser and Carmin (2009) and Young and Norris (1988). The AGB's (2006) recommendations that the search process be seen as fair and legitimate and that internal candidates with relationships in the community be provided an opportunity to compete for the job were supported by the work of Chung and Luo (2012) and Levin (1998). The fact that the findings were consistent across many different environments provides additional support for the research and for its impact on the presidential transition process in higher education.

Second, the studies across all four sectors focused on distinct parts of the transition process. The first part of the process is identification of organizational needs and priorities. The second part is the actual selection process. The final part is the communication of those decisions to stakeholders and the communication of stakeholder needs and expectations to the new leader in hopes of developing relationships. The use of qualitative studies supports the conclusion that studying the transition process requires sensitivity to the understandings and interpretations of those involved and impacted by the experience. The single study reviewed that used quantitative methods to study the

transition process examined a relationship between success and the connection between the new leader and stakeholders. Relationships and the subsequent ability to communicate a shared mission and vision are critically important elements of the transition process.

The research reviewed provides an opportunity for further study. In each of the qualitative studies, the authors examined relationships between stakeholders and the new leaders as a result of the transition process in bounded environments. No research was found that used qualitative methods to examine the experiences of a singular work role across multiple environments as a result of the presidential or leadership transition process. In each study, the researchers examined multiple perspectives at one or more institutions. The current study may help fill that gap in the literature, as it analyzed the experiences of a single stakeholder group across multiple environments.

The Nature of the Presidency in Higher Education

This section reviews literature on the nature of the presidency at a college or university, including the complexity of the job, the job's connection to organizational values, the importance of developing relationships between the president and campus stakeholders, and the authority a president derives from his or her position in the organizational hierarchy. Understanding these aspects of the presidency can help identify ways a transition process can support a newly appointed president.

Complexity of the Job Role

An academic president must satisfy numerous stakeholders who have vastly different goals, objectives, and views of what the institution should be doing. A president

must also work artfully with alumni, donors, community members, and increasingly vocal constituents demanding greater public accountability for campus work. A president must be a diplomat and manager, a delegator and decision-maker, an academic and entrepreneur (Kerr & Gade, 1986). Sanaghan, Goldstein, and Gaval (2008, p. 100) commented on the challenges: "The objectives of one stakeholder group are in conflict with those of another stakeholder group. . . . Presidents would do well to recognize that they cannot please everyone and that attempting to do so is likely to lead to problems in the long run."

Many stakeholder groups are deeply invested in the institution. Because the president is the symbolic and substantive leader, his or her actions are watched closely. This gives the president a platform to move the institution forward, but it also presents challenges. Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue (2013) wrote that leading an institution of higher education is so difficult because of the multiplicity of expectations from stakeholders that we "might commend equipping presidents with asbestos suits and body armor" (p. 3). However, the challenge is worth the cost, as "giving leadership to an organization deliberately designed to equip men and women in mind, body, spirit and integrity for a life with meaning . . . is a call of nobility worth any challenges a leader might come across" (Trachtenberg et al., 2013, p. 3).

To preserve both core academic values and a sense of responsibility, elaborate and complex systems are established. Padilla (2004) argued that the complexity stems from the connection between the institution and the larger world. Based on Labaree's (1997) argument that the purpose of higher education is to educate citizens, provide vocational training, and create opportunity for social mobility, higher education is

intimately connected to the world around it. As the world changes, higher education must respond. Future citizens may need to be provided with different educational experiences than they were in previous generations. Vocations change. As a result, the institution must respond in order to remain connected. If it is not connected, it cannot meet its historical mission.

Others have examined the way in which these systems have often had ambiguous and competing goals leading to exceptionally complex institutions. Weingartner (2011) argued, “Academic institutions are complex in ways in which even such a huge corporation as General Electric is not” (p. 2). A company as large and complex as General Electric has one ultimate goal, which is to increase profits. A college or university has many worthy and often incongruous goals. Teaching may come at the expense of research. Professors’ service to the academic community on committees may impact their ability to serve the surrounding community simply because time is limited. A decision in one area may also impact another part of the institution. An academic leader may budget more money for faculty research, allowing faculty to teach fewer classes and decreasing student interaction. Research expenditures may go up, and student engagement may suffer. The complexity of goals leads to complex governance systems and processes, as Weingartner (2011) asserted. Trachtenberg et al. (2013) argued that higher education institutions have a number of legitimate missions, purposes, and outcomes, leading to varying interpretations of organizational mission and effectiveness and making evaluation difficult. Julius, Baldrige, and Pfeffer (1999) concurred and added that because of the multiple goals and interpretations of mission, any number of activities may be viewed as legitimate.

These competing goals and purposes come from the wide-ranging impacts the work of the institution can have on different groups. Students grow academically and socially from their time on campus. Faculty members are connected to colleagues and their disciplines and are provided the opportunity to create new knowledge. Parents hope that their sons and daughters develop into healthy, functioning adults. Surrounding community members look to benefit from the research done on campus. Employers hope colleges and universities produce employable adults. Lawmakers, as public representatives who prioritize funding of colleges and universities, hope colleges and universities improve the local economy for their constituents. All of these goals are important and valid, and institutions strive to meet them. However, differing goals mean different evaluation standards. As Padilla (2004) stated, “In the higher education sector, where there are no stock prices or sales and revenue figures to consider, organizational performance can be particularly difficult to measure and quantify” (p. 51).

Because these institutions and their missions are so complex, it is important to study the way decisions are made. Such a study reveals what leaders prioritize and what forces impact those decisions. Birnbaum (2000) argued that competing goals and complex systems and processes lead to political decision-making. He stated that no system meets the needs of all stakeholders: “Because the demands of legality, efficiency, and effectiveness may be mutually inconsistent and in part because the interests of the various groups are often in conflict . . . different systems serve different purposes” (Birnbaum, 2000, p. 29). Birnbaum (2000) continued by arguing that the choice of one management system over another is a political, not a technical, decision. Julius et al. (1999) and Weingartner (2011) concurred with Birnbaum’s argument about the

connection between goal ambiguity and political behavior. Weingartner (2011) added that political decision behavior may stem from the competition for scarce resources. As colleges and universities adopt behaviors designed to adapt to economic realities, individuals and stakeholders may increasingly demonstrate political behavior in response.

For all types of higher education institutions, the complexity of missions and evaluation standards leads to divergent standards for academic presidents. Differing interests lead to different expectations. A president may very well make a wise decision that benefits the institution as a whole. However, the decision may upset certain constituencies even as others are pleased. An academic president is therefore weakened each time he or she makes a decision in an environment where there are divergent expectations and hopes for the president and institution. Fleming (2010) wrote, “These varying perceptions of institutional purpose cultivate an environment in which college and university presidents are held accountable to multiple standards that derive largely from idiosyncratic interests,” which may end up leading to further ambiguity (p. 253). Rosenzweig (2001) argued that a president operates from a very weak power base as a result of the varying views of organizational mission. Further, Rosenzweig (2001) posited that a president is so weak that one frustrated constituency may undo a presidency. A president, suggested Rosenzweig (2001), may be more powerful away from campus than on campus.

Fleming (2000) surveyed members of the faculty senate from 103 different American research universities in order to examine their expectations for an academic president. With a total population of 2,395, he received 508 responses from universities with six different Carnegie classifications (p. 256). He then analyzed responses, using

analysis of variance, based on academic rank, tenure status, experience as academic department chair, experience as faculty senate chair, experience as an elected member of the faculty senate committee, gender, and race/ethnicity. By separating responses in such a way, Fleming made the assumption that differences in characteristics would lead to different expectations of the president.

Fleming (2010) found the job of a president was to be the primary voice of the institution, as the president was in a position to interact with and lead all stakeholder groups. Fleming (2010) also posited that it was difficult to satisfy the multiple expectations from the various constituencies. In short, Fleming (2010) argued that presidents must not simply seek to satisfy one group at a time, but must understand how a decision impacts all groups. Presidents become more powerful as they place their office and decision-making role at the center of the institution, working with all groups to establish priorities. No other leader is in a position to see the way decisions impact the collective.

This research could be built upon with the use of qualitative methodology, which would provide insight into the reasons why those in various stakeholder groups answered the way they did. Qualitative research could also provide insight into techniques to guide the practice of presidents who work with these stakeholder groups. The research could also be improved by expanding beyond faculty members at research universities. Administrators, students, adjunct faculty members, parents, local citizens, and alumni could all add input to the expectations placed on college and university presidents. Learning about the perceptions of those at nonresearch institutions would be helpful as

well. The comparison would provide insight into the pressures college and university presidents face in different environments.

Complexity conclusion. This subsection examined the reasons why the academic presidency is a complex role. Differing interpretations of organizational mission lead to differing evaluation standards and varying expectations for the president. The ambiguity stemming from the complexity of the presidential role may lead to increased political behavior. Presidents may feel compelled to make decisions that align with the wishes of the strongest stakeholder group. Other stakeholders may sense that a president acts based on political expediency and then attempt to forward their agenda using political means as opposed to more collegial or bureaucratic operating procedures (Birnbaum, 2000). The problem with political decision-making in this context is that there are no clear rules for the decision-making process. As a result, there are no parameters under which stakeholders should operate. Without clear processes and parameters, stakeholders cannot fully articulate why a decision was made or determine if a similar decision will be made in the same way during the next decision-making process. This makes it very difficult to get stakeholders committed to common goals and action.

A college or university president must understand where his or her power resides in this new environment. This understanding of the college presidency views the role as a social construction. He or she is not the ultimate decision-maker, but a voice of the varying interest groups and stakeholders. Presidents must not seek to satisfy one particular stakeholder group; they must understand all views and bring them together in a single direction, communicate a vision, and bring needed resources to projects on campus

that support the shared vision. The role of the president is therefore to serve as a conduit between stakeholder groups on and off campus.

Of the literature reviewed, only Fleming's study used quantitative methods. The use of qualitative methods may provide additional insight into the different interpretations surrounding the complexity of the presidency. This type of research may tell us not just that the job is complex but why different groups place different expectations on presidents. Such methods may also highlight additional ways presidents can work through these differing expectations to build relationships with stakeholders.

The next subsection reviews literature on organizational values and their role in the development of relationships between academic presidents and stakeholders. An understanding of and deep connection to institutional values may provide a college or university president with the ability to develop relationships that help cut through the ambiguity resulting from the complexity of the job role.

Institutional Values and Culture

This subsection reviews and analyzes literature about how academic presidents may connect to organizational values to move an institution forward. It specifically examines the way organizational values and culture impact stakeholders' identity and connection to the institution, the way in which presidents may personify institutional values, and the way values and culture may drive institutional change.

Presidents are viewed as the substantive and symbolic leaders of their institution. Rosenzweig (2001) wrote, "As the university's principal public person, the president carries the burden of explaining to the public what it needs from the university" (p. 192). A president may encourage stakeholders to commit to a particular vision for the college

or university by ensuring that vision is tied to organizational values. This provides the president with a better framework through which to make and communicate decisions. Rosenzweig (2001) argued that the president has a central role in understanding and communicating institutional values: “This is a task of moral suasion, not regulation and enforcement. . . . The principal educator in this classroom is the university president. . . . He or she occupies the lectern” (p. 106). Kerr and Gade (1986) identified and analyzed many types of college and university presidencies and noted that in one model of presidency, the president is at the “center of the decision-making process . . . as the chief negotiator, the chief persuader, the chief mediator among other centers of influence” (p. 133). They continued that the “president runs the major communication center and acts as the principal intermediary, the first among equals” (Kerr & Gade, 1986, p. 133). Former Brown University President Vartan Gregorian concurred with Rosenzweig’s view and added, “One has to understand what move institutions, and it’s not money or structure. It’s values” (Gregorian & Martin, 2004, p. 22).

Tierney (2008) recognized organizational culture as a tool leaders can use and added that it provides managers with a way to understand how decisions in one area of campus life will impact other areas of campus life. Bess and Dee (2012) described organizational culture as containing the values, beliefs, and assumptions of the organization. Tierney (2008) wrote, “By working within the framework of organizational culture, administrators learn to consider how change in one programmatic area will affect other areas” (p. 20).

While organizational culture may be a useful tool for leaders to use, it may be difficult to influence stakeholders because of existing organizational identities.

Organizational identity provides an academic leader with a particular tool to develop relationships and move stakeholders towards a shared vision. As Brown and Starkey (2000) stated, “Information that threatens an organization’s collective self-concept is ignored, rejected, reinterpreted, hidden or lost” (p. 103). Further, “organizations fail to learn because of the operation of ego defenses that maintain collective self-esteem” (Brown & Starkey, 2000, p. 104). They suggested that to mitigate those defenses, “organizations must embrace an identity as a learning organization [which] involves an organization’s challenging its assumptions regarding its existing identity and promoting a dialogue focused on desirable future identities” (Brown & Starkey, 2000, p. 104). Leaders then must understand as many aspects of the organizational identity as possible in order to communicate the areas of the identity they want prioritized.

Jacques produced seminal work on the concept of social defenses kindled by organizational shifts, according to Long (2006). In that initial work, Jacques argued that it is difficult to promote organizational change precisely because individuals associated with the organization have a portion of their identities tied to the organization’s identity. He wrote, “People unconsciously cling to the institutions they have, because changes in social relationships threaten to disturb existing social defences” (Jaques, 1955, p. 479). An individual’s connection to an organization provides an understanding of social relationships, norms, and expectations. When a president asks an organization with a deeply held identity to change, he or she is asking individuals connected to the organization to change as well. This makes organizational change especially hard to accomplish.

The concept of organizational identity is at play during the presidential transition process because organizational identity and associated culture can influence the work of a newly selected president. A new president cannot simply enter the position and expect an organization to change even if the vision is objectively the right one for the institution. A new leader must understand how the institution sees itself and how it has established its positive self-image. Working within that construct, a leader may then use that organizational identity to bring the institution to the place it needs to be. Attempting to make changes too quickly may very well threaten the institution's collective identity and the leader's initiatives. The presidential transition process may provide a new president with an understanding of the way stakeholders view the organization. The transition period is also a time of organizational reflection, when many of those discussions will surface (Balser & Carmin, 2009).

Kezar and Eckel (2002) studied institutional change strategies, examining six institutions engaged in change processes over a 4-year period using a case study methodology. They specifically examined "five core change strategies: senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, robust design (vision), staff development and visible actions" (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 436). Their findings included the "significance of culturally appropriate strategies, and the importance of examining multiple layers of culture (enterprise, institutional, and group), and the possibility of predicting which strategies will be most important" (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 437).

The use of a case study methodology provided the researchers with an interpretation of the way in which change impacted stakeholders in various environments. The use of this particular methodology when studying these questions again showed the

need for positive relationships between leaders and those with whom they work. The fact that the researchers identified the use of culturally appropriate strategies is important because those who do the work of the institution are more effective when they understand and accept a common vision. Culture helps connect leaders and workers. As such, change strategies that value those cultural characteristics are more likely to succeed. The selection of a president with the ability to be sensitive to institutional culture and the design of a socialization process that values culture may provide a new president with a more successful transition into the job, benefiting the new president and the college or university.

Values and culture conclusion. This subsection has reviewed literature describing the effect of organizational identities when devising change strategies. When selecting and socializing a new president, leaders of the process should consider how a president might use organizational identity to move an agenda forward. A selection committee should consider not just the background, experience, skill set, and temperament of a potential president, but the way a potential president's background, experience, skill set, and temperament may be applied to the current context at the institution. Those on the selection committee must examine the way the prospective president will be able to connect the institution with the current issues facing the college or university and move it forward.

The committee charged with socializing the new president should also consider organizational identity and related culture. They should be mindful when presenting budget analysis or organizational charts; rather than just presenting the information, they need to provide contextual information describing why the decision-making led to the

information presented. That thinking will provide the new president with information that will help him or her make and communicate decisions in the future. Taking into account an organization's identity helps leaders understand the current environment, make decisions, and communicate those decisions in a way that brings the organization together in a common direction.

The next subsection examines the way a president may connect to the values of a college or university based on the degree to which he or she is a social match with the prevailing organizational culture.

Social Match

One way a president can connect to the people and values that give life to a college or university is by being a social match with the values held by the people of the institution. The job of a college president is difficult for many reasons, not the least of which is cutting through the interests of differing and often conflicting opinions and having very few levers of power to make decisions and move an institution forward. One way a president can move through that ambiguity is by becoming as close to stakeholder groups and individuals as possible. The better the president knows the groups and people, the better sense he or she will have of what they hope for and expect from leaders and the positive and negative consequences associated with any decision or action. Relationships are easier to develop if there are similarities between the president and the members of the stakeholder groups. McLaughlin (1996) wrote, "In higher education, relationships are the coin of the realm; the president's authority (and security) comes not from raw power but from the strength of his or her relationships with others at the institution" (pp. 12-13).

Cohen and March (1974) produced seminal work on the concept. They argued, “The result of the selection process is the selection of presidents who are likely, in so far as one can judge from social backgrounds, to be acceptable to the main internal and external groups concerned with the college” (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 24). They continued:

Socialization produces an expectation that presidents will share the values of their subordinates and the members of important subgroups inside the college. . . . Disagreement with students or faculty is not only a political event for many presidents, it is also a problem of identity—and a surprise. (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 25)

The concept of social match has been used and incorporated by other scholars and practitioners. Haley-Will (2010) agreed with the concept described by Cohen and March and added that cultural characteristics are important when assessing the fit between the candidate and institution. McLaughlin (1996) concurred and noted that a new president should also be a contextual fit. The new president’s skill set should be the skill set the institution needs at that particular time.

In the presidential transition process, this concept provides a lens to identify which group is most connected to the selected president. The transition process can also indicate which stakeholder group has values that align most closely with those of the new president based on identified priorities of the search. Birnbaum (1988b) noted, “The committee also serves as a symbol that permits various constituencies to display or enhance their status within the organization. . . . Serious conflict can result when a committee is formed or operates in a manner inconsistent with the expectations of important constituencies” (p. 494). Birnbaum (1988b) also argued that the composition of a search committee provides the candidate with an understanding of institutional

priorities and power: “A search committee with significant faculty membership suggests to a candidate different normative expectations about the interaction and influence of campus constituencies than does a committee dominated by trustees” (p. 495). The presidential transition process forces the institution to decide what its challenges are, which group has power, and what those stakeholders want in a leader moving forward. If an institution understands those answers, it has a better chance of communicating that effectively to a candidate with the right personal and professional skill set to do the job successfully.

If the new president is to be “surprised” by a disagreement with a key stakeholder group, it may indicate that the president had a better understanding of one group rather than another. The group picking the president then gets to pick which group or groups are “in” power and which group or groups are “out” of power. That decision may set up a recursive dynamic on campus. The “out” group must constantly attempt to convince the new president that its plan or work is worthy of being prioritized. Had the selected president been socialized in the same way that the “out” group members had been socialized, he or she may prioritize the plans or work done by that group. The new president’s social match with a particular stakeholder group may very well signal actual work-related priorities of the institution or representatives of the dominant group during the selection process.

This understanding of social match provides a new way to look at traits an effective president might need. Presidents are concerned about being surprised according to Cohen and March (1974). If the president is selected by a dominant stakeholder group, is socially matched with that group, which also then has a disproportionate sway on the

onboarding process, a new president may not be provided with a complete picture of the issues facing the institution. As an example, board members could hire a new president from the private sector, matching their socialization, with the expectation that campus budgeting and planning processes be streamlined and improved. The new president may be surprised to find out that the budgeting and planning issues stemmed from curricular challenges, typically the purview of the faculty. A president socialized as a scholar may understand and be able to communicate more effectively about the issues than would a president with an administrative background. In this example, the selected president from the private sector would be surprised because his socialization was not in alignment and the selection and onboarding processes were not inclusive, creating a lack of alignment between the needs of the institution and the skill sets of the new president.

In order to operate in this environment, a president needs the ability to be detached and objective. The president must be able to understand all experiences to prioritize properly and not be led by one or more powerful groups. The president must see himself or herself as the leader bringing groups together rather than one who is led by whichever group is in power. The president finds authority by being the arbiter between competing priorities. This assessment of needed traits for a successful presidency fits with the research conducted by Kezar and Eckel (2002), who found “the need for practitioners to become cultural outsiders in order to observe institutional patterns” (p. 437). By becoming detached, presidents can use the most appropriate leadership tool at their disposal rather than being dictated to by groups or situations.

Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) examined presidential career paths, relationships between career path and institution type, and relationships between career path and

personal characteristics of presidents. To collect their data, Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) used information about the background of college and university presidents submitted to the American Council on Education as part of a questionnaire. They then put that information into context by examining the two most recent jobs of each president and whether or not they had served as a full-time faculty member. Those responses were organized into one of four categories: scholar, steward, spanner, and stranger (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001, p. 205).

Their research found that compared with results from all respondents, presidents of baccalaureate institutions were much less likely to fall into the traditional scholar category (62.4% vs. 79.6%) and much more likely to be in the nontraditional spanner category (14.4%) or stranger category (7.8%) (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001, p. 207). The fact that the researchers thought to examine the backgrounds of presidents at different types of institutions provides additional evidence that the personal characteristics of a president may influence the way he or she relates to campus stakeholder groups. The ability of a potential presidential candidate to develop relationships with stakeholder groups should be a point of emphasis for search committees.

This study adds to the presidential transition literature because it highlights the link between experiences and relationships between stakeholders and the president. Additional qualitative studies could address why the presidents at different types of institutions end up having different experiences.

Social match conclusion. The ability of a president to develop relationships with stakeholder groups helps a president work through the ambiguity resulting from the complexity of the competing priorities and stakeholder groups. Understanding the way

stakeholders experience the institution allows the president to develop relationships and connect to institutional values. Those values allow a president to bind the groups together to move the institution towards common goals. The next subsection discusses how a president can use his or her structural authority to work with all stakeholders and move the institution forward.

Structural Authority in the Administrative Hierarchy

Another tool presidents have at their disposal in dealing with the challenges of the job and current environment is the authority they have based on their location in the administrative hierarchy. College and university presidents do not have the same level of decision-making authority compared with their counterparts in the private sector. They cannot fire faculty members who share a different view of the direction of the institution, reorganize an academic department, or rebrand or market the institution differently with the same ease of a counterpart in the for-profit sector. However, they do have a position in the administrative hierarchy that provides them with access to more information than any other person on campus. All academic and administrative departments ultimately report to the president. The board of trustees generally must work through the president's office to have access to the other departments and people on campus. This structural authority provides presidents the space to lead in two meaningful ways. The president, unlike any other campus entity, can receive information across all components and, as a result, is presumed to speak for the entire institution.

Because a president has an understanding of the issues across all departments and campus components, he or she must ask questions that lead to possible solutions that require the input of multiple campus components. Cross-programmatic issues require

cross-programmatic solutions. A president is in a position to see those issues and strategically drive solutions. Trachtenberg (2002) referred to the view of a president in this way: “The most amazing thing about our virtual mosaic is that the growth of one part . . . need not distort or degrade or displace any other part. . . . The whole picture changes and grows as each of its institutions and citizens changes and grows” (p. 118).

Sanaghan et al. (2008) examined the structural authority of a president and argued that because the president has better access to information than any other group on campus, the president is obliged to communicate that singular understanding to others. That ability is where presidents derive their authority and ability to drive change. They wrote, “Only the president can truly encourage honest communication, information flow and feedback” (Sanaghan et al., 2008, p. 23). The AGB (2006) in its report on the state of the presidency viewed the office similarly and argued that the president derives power from his or her ability to communicate and develop a shared vision. In order to move the college or university forward, “the president must create the framework for participation that allows the faculty, the senior leadership team, the board, students and other stakeholders to trust a president and accord the support required to advance the institution” (p. 4).

A president is presumed to speak for the entire institution and, as a result, those relationships, the information, and the symbolic importance provide the president with a powerful tool (McLaughlin, 1996). Sanaghan et al. (2008) wrote, “The president represents more than his leadership role; he represents the institution with all its power, textures, history, and tradition” (p. 22). When speaking on or off campus, a president is presumed to speak for the entire campus. The AGB (2006) concurred: “In public venues,

a president's words and actions almost always are taken as expressions of the institution's identity" (p. 4). The president does not simply tell someone "no" or "yes"; the rest of the community is presumed to be in some form of pluralistic agreement. That communication from the president then influences the way in which the person given the news interacts with other members of the community. That decision sets parameters and influences decision-making throughout many levels of the organization.

Structural authority conclusion. The way in which a potential president leads within an organizational hierarchy can provide those managing the selection process with additional insight into traits needed for a president to be successful in a particular context. The president at a college or university sits in a unique place in the administrative hierarchy. He or she has access to information no other role or entity has and is expected to speak for the entire institution. A college president must use this position to establish relationships and communicate effectively. The ability of a potential president to use the role to move the institution forward should be a major focus of a presidential search committee.

Theoretical/Analytical Framework: Decision Making

This study was conducted through the lens of organizational decision-making. Bess and Dee (2012) described decision-making as a complex process designed to develop a solution to a problem in hopes of building a common course of action. They also stated that in the higher education environment, "there is ambiguity not so much about the decision at hand but about who is responsible for making the decision . . . and commitment consequences of including or excluding different constituencies in the process" (Bess & Dee, 2012, p. 589).

This ambiguity forces decision-makers to have a specific set of skills and experiences leading to the formation and continuation of relationships with stakeholders. Bess and Dee (2012) stated that the complexity of a decision is based on the unit of analysis, the nature of the problem, qualities of the decision-maker, qualities of the followers, organizational conditions, and the nature of the decision. Those factors are socially constructed and can be summarized by describing what issue is to be decided, who gets to decide it, and what factors will determine success or failure of the decision. Analyzing the factors identified by Bess and Dee can provide insight into the way decision-makers and organizations can structure decision-making processes to ensure alignment between a decision-making process, problem, and solution.

Decision-Making Models

Scholars have identified a number of decision-making models. Keeney (2012) evaluated decision-making frameworks used by a particular subset of campus leaders. The current study used the same seven frameworks in order to build on the existing literature. This section describes each of the models and analyzes the way each model may or may not facilitate the development of relationships between leaders and stakeholders, a major focus of presidential transition processes at colleges and universities.

Bureaucratic. One type of decision-making model is termed the bureaucratic model of decision-making. Pusser (2003) characterized the bureaucratic model as being driven by goals and led by hierarchical authority, ultimately leading to centralization of control, standardization, and legitimacy. Such a model may be appropriate in some aspects of the presidential transition process and inappropriate in others based on the nature of the decision. The inclusion of certain members of the bureaucracy while the

college or university is constructing its self-evaluation and reflecting on its future needs and goals may add legitimacy to the decisions. The inclusion of senior leaders of the bureaucratic administration in the onboarding process may provide the new president with the ability to communicate his or her goals, ultimately strengthening the real or perceived authority of the senior leaders with those in their administrative units.

Decision-making that supports a bureaucratic environment may strengthen the organization's commitment to prioritized goals. The use of decision-making models that support bureaucratic environments may be inappropriate if the new president is not provided the opportunity to hear directly from line workers about the nature of the problem. A leader may then be left with fewer solutions.

Collegial. Pusser (2003) argued that decision-making in a collegial environment is based on "collective action and widely shared values" (p. 123). Pusser (2003) continued by stating that in this framework, "conflict is a form of collegial dysfunction" (p. 124). Birnbaum (1988b) added that collegial decision-making environments are thorough and deliberate; groups attempt to reach consensus, and participants are viewed as equals who have influence in the decision-making process. Birnbaum (1988a) examined how difficult it is for a leader to make significant changes in a collegial environment. A leader is provided legitimacy in an environment for demonstrating group norms and values. He or she, however, is punished by the group and loses legitimacy when those norms and values are pushed, examined, or reviewed. Decision-making in such an environment may lead to a continuation of the status quo. This may or may not be positive depending on how a particular group understands and defines the nature of the decision to be made and the problem to be addressed.

Cultural. The next type of decision-making model is the cultural decision-making framework. Bess and Dee (2012) wrote that organizational culture is “the unseen but experienced and felt ambience of an organization that includes a large variety of norms about work and other behavior or organizational members” (p. 465). Tierney (2008) noted that a cultural perspective provides an “understanding of how seemingly unconnected acts and events fall into place,” which provides an academic leader an understanding of stakeholder group interpretations (p. 6). With this understanding, academic leaders can communicate more effectively in hopes of moving the community together in a common direction. Tierney (2008) went on to argue that in such an environment, a leader’s role is to “understand the environmental changes that take place and to help the organization adapt to the new demands of the environment” (p. 10). Decision-making in this framework requires leaders to define clearly the nature of the problem and the nature of the decision. If an academic leader is expected to bind the community together because of an understanding of shared values and expectations, he or she takes on the responsibility of identifying the proper nature of the problem. The ability of a leader is tested regularly.

Garbage can. March (1994) described the garbage can model as one where “problems and solutions are attached to choices, and thus to each other, not because of any means-ends linkage but because of their temporal proximity” (p. 200). Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) further defined the garbage can model by stating, “One can view a choice opportunity as a garbage can into which problems and solutions are dumped by participants as they are generated” (p. 2). Cohen et al. (1972) went on to say that the mix in the can is dependent on the type of cans available and the way we label

them (the problems identified), the type of garbage produced, and the speed the garbage is collected and removed (solutions available in the time provided). This framework, like the cultural model, requires the decision-maker to identify the nature of the problem and the decision. The type of environment and the ability of the leader to connect to followers who may have better solutions may limit the solutions available to the decision-maker.

Intuition. March and Simon (1993) described intuition and associated decision-making as “rapid response . . . and inability of the respondent to report a sequence of steps leading to the result” (p. 11). They also stated that this type of decision-making is closely associated with the “phenomenon of recognition” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 11).

Decision-makers make decisions “without explicit conscious calculation,” and the ability to make good decisions not by analysis alone comes from the development of intuition or “rules of action acquired through years of training and experience” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 12). The use of intuition may be helpful to decision-makers in individual instances, but it may be difficult in organizational decision-making settings. Without a formalized process to define the parameters, those who do not have the experience or are not in a position to influence the decision may not have a full understanding of the decision. Their ability to then act on that decision in their work will be limited. Further, those not involved in the decision will not know how the decisions they make moving forward will connect to the larger organizational decision-making paradigm. It becomes much more difficult for the organization to develop a course of action towards a common goal.

Political. Pusser (2003) characterized elements of political decision-making as bargaining, coalition building, and negotiations between interests. March (1994)

provided two constructs for decision-making analysis in large and complex systems like a college or university; the first asks who gets what and how they get it, while the second asks how negotiation partners are found and agreements enacted. March (1994) continued, “The resulting decisions are sometimes confusing if considered from the perspective of a single, coherent decision-maker or team” (p. 140). This type of decision-making framework puts additional pressure on those who construct it to then communicate the structure, process, and outcomes of the process. Pusser (2003) argued that such a model requires the leaders to serve as “boundary spanners, key actors who mediate, or articulate, between internal and external constituencies” (p. 124).

Rationality. The final decision-making framework is termed rationality. March and Simon (1993) described a framework for rational decision-making as one that provides decision-makers with reasons that inform both their choices and “justifications for those choices” (p. 7). Further, this framework provides a “basis for predicting both behavior and explanations of behavior” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 7). The rationality is based on the probable consequences the actor may conceive: “The logic of consequences is linked to conceptions of anticipations, analysis and calculation” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 8). The other consideration in this framework was described as the logic of appropriateness by March and Simon (1993). They wrote, “Actions are chosen by recognizing a situation as being of a familiar, frequently encountered, type, and matching the recognized situation to a set of rules” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 8). This framework provides more evidence the decision-maker is charged with properly identifying the nature of the decision and the problem. If the decision-maker sets up rules, he or she is in

a position to construct the response. That response has consequences for which the decision-maker is responsible.

Decision-making provides a framework to examine and understand the selection and socialization process of new presidents. The framework provides insight into group dynamics and other social and contextual factors that influence the ultimate decision to hire a new president and the new president's socialization process. Birnbaum (1988a) described a cybernetic model of organizations, which describes the way decisions are made by institutions. Birnbaum (1988a) indicated that colleges and universities are controlled through "cybernetic controls," which are "self-correcting mechanisms that monitor organizational functions and provide attention and cues, or negative feedback, when things are not going well" (p. 179). He argued that organizations "respond to a limited number of inputs to monitor their operation and make corrections and adjustments as necessary" (Birnbaum, 1988a, p. 181). Birnbaum (1988a) referred to these control systems as "thermostats" (p. 182). These systems are maintained through "organizational rules, regulations, and structures and social controls," which are developed through "the interaction of individuals in groups that lead them toward shared attitudes and concern for group cohesion" (Birnbaum, 1988a, p. 182). This model shows how decision-making frames are useful in analyzing dynamics between individuals in an organization.

Viewing the transition process through a decision-making framework provides insight into the way a new president must interact with the various stakeholder groups once in office. If the movement of groups through shared cultural norms brought a president into office, a president must then understand and use those cultural assumptions to move the community forward. If the decision to select and socialize a president was

made by a handful of board members, the new president may need to understand that dynamic and work with stakeholder groups accordingly. Understanding the organizational decision-making process surrounding a presidential transition provides insight into the ways presidents and those managing presidential transition processes can manage complexity in the environment.

Inferences for the Current Study

The question addressed in this study was the way in which stakeholder groups experience the presidential transition process. The process is a time of significant introspection for an institution and, as such, may be a time of significant change for the college or university and those connected to it. The literature also pointed out that presidents may be more successful if they develop better relationships with stakeholders, as presidents have symbolic and substantive authority as a result of their position in the administrative hierarchy and ability to access information. The current study examined the way one particular and important group, senior academic leaders, experienced the process. This group was especially important to examine because it sits at the intersection of academic and administrative decision-making.

The current study adds to the literature in three ways. First, there has been little empirical work on presidential transitions in higher education (McLaughlin, 1996; Stanley & Betts, 2004). There has also been little empirical work on academic governance (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). Because of the lack of literature on the subject, this chapter reviewed literature on the transition process in government, nonprofit, and for-profit contexts along with the few studies that have been produced about higher education. There are similarities and differences among the contexts, which can provide

additional insight into the transition process in higher education. This chapter also reviewed literature provided by practitioners in order to overcome this gap. Much of this work was nonempirical and as such was treated as autobiographical work. The long, thick descriptions of their experiences were reviewed and critiqued to place them in the context of other work on the topic.

Second, the current study adds to the body of literature by focusing on the views of one stakeholder group across multiple locations of study. Much of the other work has reviewed multiple stakeholder views at a single location. The works of Young and Norris (1988) and Balser and Carmin (2009) were case studies that reviewed inputs from multiple sources at single sites. The current research fills the void by examining the experiences of a single stakeholder group across multiple locations, comparing practices to better understand how the transition process is experienced by a single group of stakeholders.

Third, the study provides additional insight on organizational decision-making at institutions of higher education. Specifically, it described which decision-making frames were present. It also provided evidence that senior academic leaders have a preference for working in a collegial frame.

Application and Synthesis

The college presidency is both a substantive and symbolic position and, as such, the way the president is selected and socialized has additional meaning. Many look to the presidential selection process as an important institutional decision. How the process is constructed and who is involved in the selection process sends a signal to the rest of the

community about which individuals and groups are powerful and in favor (Birnbaum, 1988b).

A new president must attempt to examine the process by which he or she came to power. A new president will need the goodwill of every constituency and as many stakeholders as possible. If a group or groups feel left out of the selection and transition process, the president must know this and moderate his or her relationships. Likewise, a new president must also be wary of groups perceived as powerful during the selection and transition processes. They are vestiges of the current power structure. The president must be able to set the strategic agenda for his or her presidency as objectively as possible if he or she hopes to then make new meaning including as many stakeholder groups as possible. A new president must therefore understand the decision-making process used to select and socialize him or her. Understanding the way this major decision was made can tell the new president how other decisions can or should be made and ultimately the expectations for interaction with the various stakeholder groups.

Chapter Conclusion

By understanding and describing the way in which senior academic leaders are involved in and experience the presidential decision-making process, it is possible to better understand how colleges and universities are dealing with environmental pressures and the associated tension between economic realities and academic values. This research added to the body of literature in higher education, which does not have a great deal of empirical research on the transition process itself. This study also informed practice. Those charged with administering the selection and onboarding processes of

new presidents may benefit from a discussion of the experiences of others.

Understanding those experiences may alter processes led by other practitioners.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

Colleges and universities face numerous challenges. Increasing calls for accountability, inadequate public funding, changing demographics, growing demand, increasing competition, and new methods of delivery are some of the most pressing (AGB, 2006). In their report on the state of the college presidency, the members of the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) (2006) wrote, “Facing these challenges is critical to creating the human and intellectual capital to ensure the nation’s continued social, civic, and economic well-being” (p. vi). The college president is the symbolic and substantive leader of the institution. The AGB (2006) argued that the president, as the leader of the institution, is therefore responsible for facing these new challenges while capturing public support and understanding in order to further the nation’s collective good.

The result of the challenges outlined by the AGB may lead to tension between academic values and economic realities. The way in which a college or university includes stakeholder groups in the presidential transition process provides insight into how it attempts to deal with the environmental pressures facing higher education. This study examined and described the way senior academic leaders were engaged in the presidential transition process. Their experiences with the presidential transition process were analyzed and interpreted through identified organizational decision-making frameworks.

McLaughlin (1996), along with Stanley and Betts (2004), found that a lack of literature exists on the presidential transition process. Kezar and Eckel (2004) posited

that a lack of literature exists on the governance system of higher education in general, of which the presidency is a part. Much of the literature that does exist consists of narratives written by practitioners rather than empirical research. As a result, this study relied on additional literature about leadership transition from discourses in government, business, and nonprofit management.

This chapter describes the study's research design and the procedures for data collection and data analysis. Each of the parts of the research work together to provide the reader with an understanding of senior academic leaders' interpretation of the phases of the presidential transition process, and associated decision-making processes, in a way that can be useful and trustworthy. The goal is to provide the reader with an understanding of how the research was conducted. The chapter closes with a discussion of strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and strategies for working with human subjects.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to describe, interpret, and analyze the way senior academic leaders were involved in the presidential transition process. This study provides additional insight into the way in which colleges and universities are dealing with the challenges facing higher education. Studying the experiences of senior academic leaders through an organizational decision-making framework benefits practice by identifying times in the process when practitioners can incorporate the concerns of academic leaders into the decision-making process at a college or university.

The study addressed one research question: What is the role of senior academic leaders (i.e., provost or vice president for academic affairs) in the phases of the

presidential transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities? There was one analytical question: How did the senior academic leaders (i.e., provost, vice president for academic affairs) describe the decision-making process during the various phases of the presidential transition process? This research adds to the body of literature, as it described the experiences of a specific stakeholder group during the transition process.

Research Design

Philosophical Assumptions

This study was grounded in a constructionist epistemology. Crotty (1998) wrote that a constructionist epistemology holds the following view:

All knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essential social context. (p. 42)

The constructionist epistemology fits with a research question that sought to interpret the experiences of a particular group in a presidential transition process. The way in which those senior academic leaders experienced the presidential transition process was directly related to the way in which the process led to the formation and deepening of relationships with other decision-makers. There was no objective process or systematic way to include senior academic leaders in a presidential transition process at different institutions. Each process was different. However, in each process, senior academic leaders did or did not provide input, were provided adequate or inadequate information based on their responsibility on campus or not, and were made to feel as if their voices were needed during major organizational decisions or not. The research

interpreted the experiences of the participants. That understanding describes how colleges and universities are dealing with current challenges facing higher education institutions.

The constructionist research paradigm was also consistent with the interpretivist theoretical perspective, which “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Crotty (1998) indicated that a theoretical perspective is “the theoretical stance lying behind the methodology. . . . [It] provides a context for the process involved and a basis for its logic and its criteria” (p. 66). He continued, “Whenever one examines a particular methodology, one discovers a complexus of assumptions buried within it. . . . Different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 66).

Qualitative Design

Merriam and Associates (2002) stated that when describing any research design, it is important to identify the research paradigm along with data collection and analysis procedures in order to explain the way those aspects of the research are supportive of other aspects of the study. This is important because beliefs about the nature of reality and the development of knowledge impact the way research is conducted and presented (Merriam & Associates, 2002). This study interpreted the experiences of senior academic leaders during the phases of the presidential transition process. Because of the nature of the question being researched, a research design was used that “assumes reality is socially constructed,” with “no single, observable reality” and the presence of “multiple realities or interpretations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). As a result, a basic qualitative interpretive design was used to conduct this research.

Merriam described such a study as one where “the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (Merriam, 2009, p. 22). A researcher using a basic qualitative study would be interested in “how people interpret their experiences, . . . how they construct their worlds . . . [and] what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). Merriam (2009) concluded by arguing that the purpose of a basic qualitative study is to “understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23). The description above may be applied to all types of qualitative research; Merriam (2009) noted that the difference between a basic qualitative study and other types of qualitative research (e.g., case study, ethnography, grounded study) is that the other types of studies have some other “additional dimension” (p. 23). This study had no additional dimensions as Merriam described and therefore fit in the category of a basic interpretive study.

Basic interpretive research is consistent with a constructionist epistemology, which seeks to understand how different groups experience and interpret an experience or phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). The use of a basic interpretive design was appropriate for this study because it used interviews to collect data and interpreted how a group of people interpreted their experiences, constructed their worlds, and attributed meaning to those experiences (Merriam, 2009). The next section of this chapter describes how data were collected in a way that is consistent with the goal of this research, the identified epistemology, and the study design.

Procedures for Data Collection

In order to collect data, semistructured telephone interviews with 19 senior academic leaders were conducted and were recorded. That type of data collection is

appropriate for qualitative data research (Creswell, 2013). Documents were reviewed prior to the interviews to provide context to the researcher. The documents reviewed included information readily available online. Specific sources included campus websites and local newspapers. This section describes the rationale used to select participants and the tools used to collect the data.

Sampling

In this study, a purposeful sampling strategy was used to select participants. Creswell (2013) stated that such a strategy focuses on “whom to select as participants, the type of sampling strategy, and the size of the sample to be studied” (p. 155). Merriam (2009) concurred and added that as “generalization . . . is not a goal of qualitative research,” certain types of sampling are more appropriate than others (p. 77). Purposeful sampling “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be gained” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). To gain the most possible insight, 19 senior academic leaders at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities were used as participants. To find those participants, weekly publications that report on higher education news were searched to identify presidential transitions that have taken place over the past 2 to 3 years at selective, nonprofit, private colleges and universities. Examples of publications used included *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*. Basic online research identified 55 senior academic leaders in place at those institutions during the presidential transition process.

That work provided the names and email addresses of the 19 senior academic leaders interviewed. Semistructured interviews provided an opportunity to collect rich,

thick descriptions from the participants. The number of participants was chosen based on the work of Creswell (2013). He built on the literature and suggested that a study using phenomenology uses three to 10 participants while a grounded study uses 20 to 30 (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). A basic qualitative interpretive design incorporates aspects of phenomenology, as it seeks to capture the interpretations of specific experiences of individuals, and grounded theory, as it seeks to analyze the data through specific theories about organizational decision-making. Participants were contacted until data saturation was achieved. Those senior academic leaders were asked to participate by email. A copy of the recruitment email is included in Appendix A. After 1 week, if the prospective participant did not respond, a follow-up email was sent. All participants in this study responded to either the first or second email when agreeing to participate.

Senior academic leaders were selected as the focus of the research because of their unique experiences and position in the organizational hierarchy. Labaree (1997), Gumpert (2000), Bok (2003), and Kezar (2004) shared a concern that economic forces may be encroaching on academic values in higher education. Senior academic leaders represented the ideals and values of faculty members at a college or university and were an important stakeholder group. They were also a part of the senior administrative team and in a position to be an advocate for the views of the faculty among other stakeholder groups. At the same time, senior academic leaders understood how those views may or may not align with the views of other stakeholder groups. Senior academic leaders were therefore in a position to see the way various views were valued and negotiated when major organizational decisions were made. They had the ability to describe the way in which those academic values were or were not being subsumed by economic realities.

This study captured the interpretations of those senior academic leaders during a major organizational decision-making process.

Nineteen senior academic leaders at 19 different selective, private, nonprofit colleges and universities participated in a semistructured telephone interview for this study. Each of the senior academic leaders was the senior academic leader at his or her institution. Titles of participants included provost, vice president for academic affairs, provost and dean of the college, vice president and dean of academic affairs, academic vice president and dean of the faculty, dean of the faculty, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty, provost and dean of the faculty, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the college/university, provost and chief academic officer, and provost and vice president for academic affairs. Each of the participants had a terminal degree and was in the senior academic leader role when the presidential transition occurred. Some of the participants were in the same position, while others moved into other roles on campus or at other institutions or organizations at the time of their participation in this study. Four of the 19 candidates disclosed that they were candidates for the presidency at the institution studied.

Based on information in the 2015 Carnegie classifications (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2016), the student populations of the institutions studied ranged from approximately 700 to approximately 12,500. Two of the institutions were categorized as doctoral universities: highest research activity. Two more were listed as master's colleges and universities: larger programs, and another was listed as master's colleges and universities: medium programs. Two more were listed as baccalaureate colleges: diverse fields, and the remainder of institutions were classified as

baccalaureate colleges: arts and sciences focus (Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2016).

Selective, private, nonprofit colleges and universities were selected for this study because they face challenges that may impact the presidential transition process in a way it would not at public, community, or for-profit colleges and universities. Nearly all colleges and universities face tension between economic forces and academic values. Selective, nonprofit private colleges and universities are different than their community, for-profit, and public counterparts in that they may be more tuition dependent and state governments are typically not a stakeholder group involved in the presidential transition process. All colleges and universities must consider views of faculty, students, graduates, citizens, and staff when making a major organizational decision. However, public colleges must also consider the views of the state legislature or governor when going through such a process. For-profit institutions must consider the views of financial stakeholders when managing a transition process. Private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities therefore share a set of characteristics that provide a unique view into the way in which stakeholder views are valued and incorporated into organizational decision-making.

Interview Questions

The interview questions in this study were based on research by Keeney (2012), who examined decision-making by interviewing 50 deans in academic health centers at public universities. Keeney (2012) examined strategic decision-making at these entities through seven different frames of decision-making—bureaucratic, collegial, cultural, garbage can, intuition, political, and rational—considered the most “common” in the

literature (p. 29). One difference between Keeney's study and this study is the decision-maker. Keeney's (2012) research examined individual decision-making, while this study analyzed organizational decision-making. As a result of the differing focus of the two studies, the phrasing of the questions was changed slightly. Some questions used by Keeney in her research were omitted, while other questions were added to collect adequate information about the experiences of senior academic leaders during a presidential transition process.

Keeney's (2012) questions were appropriate to use in this research for a number of reasons: Keeney's research focused on senior academic leaders' interpretations of decision-making, as did this study; the data collected in both studies was analyzed through the decision-making framework; and both studies sought to improve practice as a result of improved decision-making (Keeney, 2012). The use of the questions was therefore appropriate, as the findings of this study build on the current literature. The current study adds to the literature by evaluating the perceptions of a different group of academic leaders at multiple sites using the same decision-making framework.

Keeney's study was used to inform the development of the interview protocol. Keeney (2012) took special care to ensure that questions about bureaucracy and rationality were asked last so that participants' thinking was not influenced by what they might interpret to be the correct answer. Like Keeney's (2012) study, all questions in the interview protocol related to decision-making began by asking what role a characteristic of the decision-making framework played in the decision-making process "in order to have consistency and be able to compare and contrast the answers" (Keeney, 2012, p. 79). In addition, both studies had semistructured interview questions that allowed the

participant “to include information that he or she believed was relevant or useful” to the study (Keeney, 2012, p. 80).

The questions were organized into two groups (Table 3.1). The first group asked the participants to describe their interpretation of the decision-making processes associated with all phases of the presidential transition process. This group of questions was asked first to prompt the participants to think about the various phases of the presidential transition process and their and other stakeholders’ involvement in those phases. Specifically, the first group of questions asked the participants to think about issues of communication, the development of relationships, and the inclusion of various interpretations of stakeholders.

The questions in the second group were designed to solicit feedback about how decisions made during the presidential transition process fit into a particular decision-making framework. The study asked the participant to link a decision with the concepts associated with a particular decision-making framework. The questions were designed to elicit from the participant whether or not and the degree to which the particular decision-making framework was or was not present during the presidential transition process. The full interview protocol appears in Appendix B.

Table 3.1
Interview Questions

Group	Questions
1. The presidential transition process experience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please describe your personal involvement with the transition process. Specifically, please describe your personal involvement in each of the following phases of the process. (Prompt: Provide the participant with a definition of all phases of the presidential transition. <i>Reflection</i>: the time when an institution assesses its needs. <i>Selection</i>: the processes of choosing a new president. <i>Onboarding</i>: the time when the new president learns about the institution and its needs; the period between the selection and official start date.) 2. How were the opinions, ideas, etc., of various stakeholder groups captured during the stages of the transition process? Specifically, how were student, staff, and faculty opinions, ideas, etc., captured during the various stages of the process? 3. Were there any other important stakeholder groups who were engaged during the various phases of the transition process? Follow-up: How was each of those stakeholder groups engaged during the various phases (reflection, selection, and onboarding) of the transition process? Can you give me an example to help clarify the process for me? 4. Who formally and informally led the transition process? Follow-up: Were the formal leaders of the transition process the same as the informal leaders? 5. Were any groups particularly pleased or frustrated with the process? If so, why? 6. Please describe how aspects of the process were communicated to stakeholder groups on campus. (Prompt: Examples may include candidate visits, formal meetings to identify a position description, and meetings with the newly elected president.) 7. What was your overall reflection of the process? Follow-up: What were the strengths and weaknesses of the process? What lessons were learned? Did the process change over the course of the various phases? 8. Is there anything else you would like to add?
2. Decision-making	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What role did intuition play in the decisions associated with the presidential transition process? (<i>Intuition</i>. I will provide the participant with a description of the intuition decision-making framework: According to Keeney (2012), decisions in this framework are characterized as being made rapidly, and those making the decisions do not have the ability to describe the steps leading to the decision.) 2. What role did luck and opportunity play in the strategic decision-making process associated with the presidential transition process? (<i>Garbage-can</i>) 3. What role did formal consultation play in the decision-making processes? What role did group decision-making play in the processes? (<i>Collegiality</i>) 4. What role did the institution's culture play in the decision-making processes associated with the presidential transition process? (<i>Culture</i>) 5. What role did politics play in the strategic decision-making processes associated with the presidential transition? (<i>Politics</i>) 6. What role did procedures and rules play in the strategic decision-making processes associated with the presidential transition? (<i>Bureaucracy</i>) 7. What role did data and information play in the strategic decision-making processes associated with the presidential transition? (<i>Rationality</i>) 8. I have asked you about several ways decision-making may have occurred during the presidential transition process. Is there another way that you saw decision-making taking place? 9. Have I missed anything with my questions? 10. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Procedures for Data Analysis

In this study, data were organized according to the strategy outlined by Creswell, wherein the researcher is to “prepare and organize the data for analysis . . . reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 180). Creswell (2013) outlined several steps in this process: creating and organizing data files, reading text and making notes, describing the case and its context, aggregating the data to establish themes, interpreting the data and analysis, and finally presenting an in-depth picture of the experiences of senior academic leaders during the phases of the presidential transition process. Those steps were the foundation of the analytic strategy of the study.

Initial Organization

After the interviews were completed, the data were organized into appropriate components to analyze that were easily retrievable on the researcher’s computer. One of the 19 interviews was not recorded properly. Handwritten notes were taken during the interview, and the researcher attempted to paraphrase the important points made by the participant. The other 18 interviews were recorded and transcribed without difficulty. Prior to coding the data, the transcripts were read numerous times and the findings as a whole were analyzed. Notes or memos were drafted when participants provided important points (Creswell, 2013). The memos consisted of “short phrases, ideas or key concepts” that occurred to the researcher (Creswell, 2013, p. 183).

Data Coding

After the data were organized, they were coded so they could be interpreted and developed into findings. Saldana (2013) described coding as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). The codes were developed from patterns in the data provided by the participants. The information was organized around the experiences of senior academic leaders during the three phases (reflection, selection, and onboarding) of the presidential transition process.

The cyclical coding process began by first identifying in vivo codes (Saldana, 2013). These in vivo codes were analyzed and placed into categories. Those categories were analyzed and placed into themes or concepts, which were then turned into assertions or nodes of analysis (Saldana, 2013, p. 13).

Development of Themes

Saldana (2013) noted that coding “is only the initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation for a report” (p. 8). Themes were generated after reading and rereading the codes. Creswell (2013) described a theme as a broad unit that consists of “several codes aggregated from a common idea” (p. 186). Rather than coming from “predefined categories” (Saldana, 2013, p. 176), the themes emerged from the data; the “primary questions, goals, conceptual framework, and literature review” helped organize the information provided by participants into themes (Saldana, 2013, p. 176), “in order to develop researcher-generated theoretical constructs” (Saldana, 2013, p. 179).

Saldana (2013) wrote that the goal of theming the data is to “winnow down the number of themes to explore in a report and to develop an overarching theme from the data corpus, or an integrative theme that weaves themes together in a coherent narrative” (p. 176). In order to develop those themes from the collected and coded data, multiple strategies were employed, including looking for the stories, individual experiences, and the context of those experiences and developing a detailed description of the participants’ interpretation of the presidential transition process at their institutions (Creswell, 2013). The process led to the development of 10 themes organized around the three phases of the transition process.

Data Presentation

Thematic analysis was used to present the data, consistent with the view of Merriam (2009), who wrote, “The most common way findings are presented in a qualitative report is to organize them according to categories, themes or theory derived from the data analysis” (p. 248). The “write-up discussed each of the constructs. . . . The themes and their related data serve as illustrative examples to support the interpretation” (Saldana, 2013, p. 179). Chapter 4 presents the findings, and chapter 5 presents conclusions, compares the findings with other research, and describes the contribution of this study to the body of literature (Merriam, 2009).

Trustworthiness Strategies

A number of strategies were used to enhance the trustworthiness of this research. Creswell (2013) built on the work of Lincoln and Guba and wrote that aspects of trustworthiness in qualitative research include concepts of credibility, authenticity,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These concepts are important in qualitative research because they provide tools that can help in communicating research and building on it (Creswell, 2013). Different tools are used for researchers working with quantitative data (Creswell, 2013). In short, the tools can provide consumers and other researchers with a full understanding of how and why the researcher developed the conclusions rather than a formula for coming to that exact same conclusion (Creswell, 2013). This is consistent with research in qualitative paradigms, which seeks to interpret phenomena rather than predict outcomes.

One tool used to increase trustworthiness is the clarification of researcher bias. The author of the study comments on “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). A subjectivity statement is included following this section to clearly state researcher biases and assumptions for the reader.

Another strategy used was member checking. Member checking involves “taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). All of the participants were provided with a copy of the interview transcript and asked if it was accurate and if there was anything else they wanted to add. The transcripts were updated based on participants’ feedback.

Readers were also provided with rich, thick descriptions. Creswell (2013) built on the existing understanding of the concept and wrote:

Rich thick description allows the readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study . . . enable[ing] readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred. (p. 252)

Another strategy used was peer review, which Creswell (2013) described as having a peer “ask hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations” (p. 251). In this study, a peer doctoral student reviewed the theme book and presentation of data to ensure the themes were consistent. The peer student thought the themes were well organized and consistent with the information provided by participants and suggested no changes.

This study also incorporated the use of a pilot study. To test the methodology, a pilot interview was conducted with a senior academic leader at a private, selective, nonprofit college or university about his experiences with the presidential transition process. The processes and procedures described in this chapter were used to conduct the interview. The purpose of the pilot study was to see if the sampling, collection, or analytical choices made needed to be changed before conducting the formal interviews with the participants. The results of the pilot study were not included in the final results.

The pilot interview did provide rich feedback from the participant. The participant provided great detail and descriptions that would be appropriate for analysis and inclusion in this study. Despite the positive feedback from the participant, updates were made to the interview protocol. First, Group 2 Question 1 (regarding the intuition decision-making frame) was confusing to the participant. To address that concern, the interview protocol was updated to describe the decision-making framework before asking about the participant’s experience. Second, the conversation lasted longer than the allotted time. The interview protocol was updated to provide the participants a break between the two groups of questions.

Together, these strategies described how the conclusions were developed, allowing the work to be built upon as appropriate. As a result, the level of trustworthiness was increased.

Reflexivity

Creswell (2013) wrote, “All writing is positioned and within a stance. . . . How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on [what] we bring to research” (p. 215). Creswell (2013) argued that there are two parts of reflexivity: describing the personal experiences researchers bring to the research and describing the way those experiences interact with the phenomena being studied. Researcher reflexivity was dealt with in two ways in this study. First, as Creswell (2013) suggested, a subjectivity statement appears below to explain to the greatest extent possible the researcher’s experiences and biases. This statement provides the reader with an understanding of the way the researcher’s experiences could shape the interpretation of the data and construction of the research design. Second, long quotes from participants were used in discussing the study results. This provided the opportunity to “convey more complex understandings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 219) and to separate the researcher’s voice and the participants’ voices, allowing readers the ability to judge the “goodness” of the research and analysis.

Subjectivity Statement

Glesne (2006) stated about subjectivity, “Awareness of your subjectivities can guide you to strategies to monitor those perspectives that might, as you analyze and write up your data, shape, skew, distort, construe, and misconstrue what you make of what you

see and hear” (p. 123). Those words applied to my approach to this research. I went to a small selective liberal arts college (Hampden-Sydney College) and had an experience I valued greatly. I valued relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators and was involved in student government and played intercollegiate football. I was, and remain, close to two administrators whom I consider mentors. One of the administrators was the dean of students and the other was the president of the college. I deeply appreciated the liberal arts curriculum and the mission of the institution and made lifelong friends. Sixteen years after graduation, I value my experience more than I did when I was going through it.

After graduation, I took a job in the college’s development office, which was intended to be a 2- to 3-year opportunity. I stayed for 6 years and left with mixed emotions. I had a choice of staying, putting down roots, and attempting to make a career in development or attending graduate school and attempting new challenges. I chose to leave and went to a large research institution (Cornell University) to earn a master’s of public administration. Cornell offered approximately 4,000 classes every semester and my program allowed me to choose from any of the classes. My concentration was government, politics, and policy studies, but I gravitated towards classes that brought me back to studying issues and topics that touched on the leadership of colleges and universities. I took classes on nonprofit finance, leadership, organizational theory, and the economics of the university. My thesis was a qualitative study of presidential leadership of liberal arts colleges. I was fortunate to interview five presidents along with faculty and staff for that project. Those experiences solidified my interest in studying college and university leadership. That interest and my previous experience continue to

color my thinking about leadership, politics, policies, and organizational decision-making.

I am aware of my personal biases because of the experience I had while at Hampden-Sydney College and in many ways because of the personal relationship I was able to develop with the president while I was there. Lt. General Samuel V. Wilson led the college from 1992 to 2000. General Sam, as he was known on campus, held many prominent positions in the Army and in other intelligence components. He retired from federal service as head of the Defense Intelligence Agency. The fact that a president with his resume and experience would take such an active role in the lives of students, faculty, and staff made a lasting impression on me and my understanding of what a college president should be and do. His ability to develop relationships, communicate with all members of the community, focus stakeholders on a mission, and personify the values of the institution provided me a model to judge other college presidents and leaders in other areas.

During the course of my professional experience, I have been a lower-rung employee with a solid understanding of the surrounding organizational political dynamics and the decision-making processes. I have always hoped that voices able to add something to the decision-making process would be heard and valued. That view was both a strength and a weakness in my research. My experience ensured that I valued the way disparate stakeholder groups see, experience, and participate in the decision-making process because I believe there are negative impacts for the institution when those groups are not valued and consulted in major organizational decisions. It is a negative if passions are allowed to overwhelm objectivity.

Based on my current profession and previous work, and knowing that “the research methods [I] choose say something about [my] views as valuable knowledge,” I have developed an increasingly constructionist worldview (Glesne, 2006, p. 4). Glesne (2006) wrote that the constructionist paradigm “maintains that human beings construct their perceptions of the world, that no one perception is right or more real than another, and that these realities must be seen as wholes” (p. 7). I think this worldview accurately captures the way in which groups in different times and places see the same thing differently. I have become increasingly aware of and sensitive to the need of leadership to communicate effectively with all stakeholder groups to enhance decision-making. Outlining my experiences and associated biases helped me increase my awareness of the ways my “values, attitudes, beliefs, interests and needs . . . [may] increase [my] awareness of ways it might distort, but also increase [my] awareness of its virtuous capacity” (Glesne, 2006, p. 123).

Ethical Issues/Consideration of Human Subjects

This research was conducted only after receiving permission from the institutional review board (IRB) of The George Washington University. All work as a part of this study was completed in accordance with the standards of the IRB. The purpose of the study and their rights as research subjects were outlined to participants in the Consent Form (Appendix C). Participants also received information on how they could access any part of the research and were given the opportunity to review their transcript to ensure accuracy. Participants were assigned a unique identifier to protect their identities. Those unique identifiers were kept separate from the transcription and analysis.

All files and documents related to the study were kept private and were accessible only to the researcher. The researcher transcribed all interviews, coded and analyzed all data, and kept all information for as long as prescribed by the IRB.

Significance of the Study

This research is useful in a number of ways. This study provides additional insight on organizational decision-making at institutions of higher education. Specifically, it analyzed the use of decision-making during an important organizational decision and described the decision-making models used during the presidential transition process according to participants. The study also adds insight into the way in which tensions between academic values and economic realities play out on college or university campuses during a decision-making process and how the transition process may impact relationships between the new president and stakeholder groups.

Recommendations were developed that provide practitioners with suggestions about how to solicit input from stakeholders, inform the selection process, protect the anonymity of candidates, and facilitate the development of relationships. The audience for these findings is senior administrators who work behind the scenes to develop a process for the selection and onboarding of a new president.

Summary

This chapter has outlined and described the qualitative methods used to answer the research questions posed about the involvement of senior academic leaders in the presidential transition process at selective, private, nonprofit colleges and universities and their interpretation of the organizational decision-making process used during the

transition process. In this chapter, the selection criteria for the types of institutions and participants studied were described, as well as details on how data were collected, analyzed, and presented. A subjectivity statement describing possible researcher bias was also included. This chapter also described how the findings and analysis were validated and how human subjects were protected. Chapter 4 outlines the results of the semistructured interviews with senior academic leaders. Chapter 5 discusses the application of these findings to practice and scholarship.

CHAPTER 4:

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe, interpret, and analyze the experiences of senior academic leaders during their involvement in the presidential transition process. The 19 participants were interviewed by telephone using a semistructured, pilot-tested interview protocol. Each of the participants was a senior academic leader at a private, selective nonprofit college or university who had experienced a presidential transition process within the last three academic years.

The research question follows: What is the role of senior academic leaders (i.e., provost or vice president for academic affairs) in the phases of the presidential transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities? The analytical question follows: How did the senior academic leaders (i.e., provost, vice president for academic affairs) describe the decision-making process during the various phases of the presidential transition process? This research adds to the body of literature as it describes the experiences of a specific stakeholder group during the presidential transition process.

This study interpreted and analyzed the experiences of senior academic leaders during the presidential transition process through identified organizational decision-making models. Bess and Dee (2012) described decision-making as a complex process designed to develop a solution to a problem in hope of building a common course of action. Bess and Dee (2012) argued that the complexity of the decision is based on the unit of analysis, the nature of the problem, qualities of the decision-maker, qualities of the followers, organizational conditions, and the nature of the decision. A college or university may use a wide range of organizational decision-making models. The model

selected and the way and degree to which it was incorporated may provide insight into an organization's attempt to deal with a real or perceived issue or concern. The types of organizational decision-making models used to analyze the information collected included bureaucratic, collegial, cultural, garbage can, intuition, political, and rational.

As outlined in chapter 3, Creswell's data analysis process (2013) was used to prepare, organize, code, analyze, and present the information collected from the participants. The steps Creswell (2013) described as part of the process include creating and organizing data files, reading text and making notes, describing the case and its context, aggregating the data to establish themes, interpreting the data and analysis, and finally presenting an in-depth picture of the experiences of senior academic leaders during the phases of the presidential transition process (pp. 190-191).

After the information was collected, it was organized into appropriate components so that it was easily retrievable for analysis. The interviews were transcribed from the digital recordings. Prior to coding the data, the transcripts were read numerous times and the findings were evaluated as a whole. Information was organized and "notes or memos" were written "in the margins of transcripts" (Creswell, 2013, p. 183). The memos consisted of "short phrases, ideas or key concepts" that surfaced (Creswell, 2013, p. 183).

The data were then coded so they could be interpreted and developed into findings. Saldana (2013) described coding as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). The cyclical coding process started by first conducting in vivo coding (Saldana, 2013). The in vivo codes were then analyzed and

placed them into categories, and those categories were then analyzed and placed into themes (Saldana, 2013, p. 13). The significant themes that emerged from the data collection process are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Study Themes

Phase	Themes
Reflection	1. Senior academic leaders' involvement in institutional planning processes during the reflection phase of the presidential transition process
	2. The potential impact of formal policy on the presidential transition process
Selection	3. Senior academic leaders' participation on the presidential search committee
	4. Senior academic leaders' informal input to formal decision-makers
	5. Senior academic leaders' participation in formal interviews of presidential candidates
	6. The impact of confidentiality concerns on the presidential transition process
Onboarding	7. The role of senior academic leaders in facilitating relationship development
	8. The involvement of the immediate past president in the presidential transition process
	9. Senior academic leaders' status as tenured faculty members and the corresponding ability to speak candidly about the transition process
	10. Impact of the presidential transition process on the success of the presidency

After providing a profile of the participants, this chapter presents the results by phase—which also represents the chronological order of the presidential transition process—and theme. Rich descriptions provided by participants were used as often as possible to describe how each senior academic leader experienced the presidential transition process. As Creswell (2013) stated,

Rich thick description allows the readers to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study . . . enable[ing] readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred. (p. 252)

In summary, the participants in this process stated that they were heavily involved in the first phase, or reflection period, of the presidential transition process. They were involved in this phase by leading and participating in institutional planning processes or

by helping develop the presidential prospectus. Two participants discussed how institutional policy affected the presidential transition process. Few of the senior academic leaders who participated reported being involved in the actual search committee during the selection phase. Many participants reported being involved during this phase by providing informal feedback and by participating in formal interviews of the candidates. Numerous participants discussed the concern about confidentiality and the way that concern altered how the selection process was conducted. During the final phase of the presidential transition process, the senior academic leaders who participated in this study reported that their role was to help develop and facilitate the development of relationships. Participants also discussed the way the former president helped or hindered the development of those relationships. Some participants also identified the way tenure may provide academic freedom for senior academic leaders to speak freely during this phase in ways that other administrative leaders (e.g., vice president for student affairs or vice president for institutional advancement) may not enjoy. Finally, senior academic leaders who participated in this study described the way a presidential transition process may impact the actual presidency of a newly selected leader.

Participant Profile

Nineteen individuals at 19 different selective, private, nonprofit colleges and universities participated in this study. Each participant had a terminal degree and was the senior academic leader at his or her institution, with titles including provost, dean of the college, dean or vice president for academic affairs, dean of the faculty, and chief academic officer. The full titles are detailed in Chapter 3. In each case, the participant was in the senior academic leader role when the presidential transition occurred. Some of

the participants were in the same position at the time of the interview, while others had moved into other roles on campus or at other institutions or organizations.

During the semistructured interviews, four of the participants disclosed that they were candidates for the presidency at their institutions. None of the 19 participants were asked directly if they were candidates, but the topic came up during the natural course of the semistructured conversations. Other senior academic leaders who participated in this study may have been candidates for the presidency and not disclosed that fact to the researcher. None of the four who disclosed their candidacies was selected as president. The way in which those four candidates experienced the selection phase of the transition process was therefore markedly different than that of the other participants. These four participants were unable to be part of the search committee, interview candidates, or provide formal or informal feedback to board members or consultants during the selection phase of the presidential transition process.

The participants who did not state they were candidates were not asked why they were not candidates for the position. As such, no data were collected that would allow for conclusions to be drawn as to why senior academic leaders were or were not formal candidates for an academic presidency. The individuals may have not been in a position to fully understand why they were or were not selected as a presidential candidate or president. To understand decisions related to candidacy, decision-makers on the formal search committee or the board of trustees would have to be asked. The data collected from those 4 participants did not allow for further analysis of the decision-making framework evident during this phase of the presidential transition process.

Each of the participants was provided a non–gender-specific pseudonym to help readers follow the information provided by the participants. No information is provided about participants’ gender, size or type of institution, timing of the presidential transition, or other circumstances related to the transition to protect their confidentiality. The pseudonyms given participants are Shelby, Pat, Casey, Jamie, Parker, Avery, Eden, Reese, Morgan, Payton, Carter, Cameron, Harper, Ryan, Mason, Rory, Blake, Landry, and Elliot.

Phase 1 of the Presidential Transition Process: Reflection

This study considered the reflection period to be the time of the presidential transition when the sitting president announces his or her retirement and the college or university reflects on what it needs in a new leader to accomplish its goals. This section provides an overview of the responses of participants during this phase of the presidential transition process. Table 4.2 summarizes the involvement of the participants discussed under Themes 1 and 2.

Table 4.2
Participant Involvement in Phase 1: Reflection

Activity	Participants
Led on-campus planning processes	Casey and Reese
Involved as faculty developed a strategic white paper	Cameron
Involved in drafting the presidential prospectus	Shelby and Morgan
Not involved because of political considerations	Carter
Not involved because of confidentiality concerns	Landry
Experienced process difficulties because of lack of policy	Eden
Involved in the development of formal policy	Rory

Theme 1: Senior Academic Leaders' Involvement in Institutional Planning Processes During the Reflection Phase of the Presidential Transition Process

Prior to the selection of a new president, private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities are often involved with exercises that help the institution reflect on its immediate and long-term needs. Those processes might include identifying the need for long-term planning, beginning the planning for a comprehensive capital campaign, and beginning efforts to identify how the institution brands or markets itself. This period is an opportunity for the stakeholders to discuss and prioritize the needs of the institution so it moves in a particular direction (AGB, 2006). The outcomes of those discussions may provide the institution with an opportunity to build a prospectus for a new president that aligns the needs of the institution with the skills of a particular candidate. Given the size and scope of the portfolios of senior academic leaders, it was likely that these individuals were heavily involved in these processes.

One participant, Reese, described being involved in campus-wide planning sessions during this phase of the presidential transition process. Reese stated, "I was often asked to implement meetings and forums, university perspectives." Reese added that in her role as the senior academic leader on campus, she felt a special burden to demonstrate leadership during the process to ensure all voices were heard. She stated, "I had to steer that process, because the search firm wasn't attuned to what we needed as an institution." Another participant, Casey, described leading campus processes that connected the current campus governance processes to future issues facing new leadership. Casey offered that prior to the announcement the previous president was leaving, he took it upon himself to lead gatherings of faculty members to discuss the

future of the institution. Casey added that those sessions led to concepts and ideas that connected to another formal process where expectations for a new president were written and established.

Cameron also described being a part of the planning process when her institution was going through a transition. Cameron was involved, as leader of the faculty, by watching as faculty along with other campus leaders drafted a white paper describing the hopes for a new president and his or her impact on the institution. Cameron stated that the white paper had two purposes. First, “it is something that can be provided to a candidate. . . . It says how great we are, describes our challenges and what we want a president to embody.” Second, “it is also a little bit of a strategic planning document. . . . It describes goals and strategic direction.”

Other senior academic leaders were involved in this phase of the transition by helping to draft and review the prospectus for a new president. Shelby was involved in the first phase of the presidential transition as she helped write the prospectus for the new president as a formal part of the search committee. Shelby stated that though her institution had a closed search process, “there were meetings that were filtered up to the committee from the community, [which helped produce] the job description.” Shelby continued by saying, “I think it [the prospectus] went back out to the community before it was finalized. . . . I would say there was pretty good consensus across the community.” Shelby opined, “The result was a fair representation of what the community was looking for.” Like Shelby, Morgan stated that he and other faculty members were heavily involved in the development of the prospectus. Morgan stated, “One issue is trying to understand what should be in the qualifications. . . . Many of us had never experienced

anything other than the president in office.” As a result, “there was considerable effort to involve faculty in the construction in the desires list and in the search process itself.”

Casey, Reese, Cameron, Shelby, and Morgan exerted leadership during this phase by synthesizing the thoughts and concerns of faculty and other community members. They did so by leading public forums and developing formal written documents so that information could be shared with other stakeholders.

One participant who was less involved in the planning process was Carter. Carter described the situation on his campus and critiqued that his lack of involvement was based on other issues and concerns impacting the campus at the time of the transition. Carter stated, “Two years prior to the hiring of the new president, the president received a vote of no confidence from the faculty [and] that put a strain on the relationship between the board and the faculty and the president.” Carter continued, “When they launched the search process, I think there was a sense that it [the vote of no confidence] reflected on all of [the president’s] senior administration, even though we weren’t named.” He stated that as a result, “there was only one senior staff on the search committee, a dear friend of mine; he was probably least touched by that vote of no confidence.” When the prospectus was published, it “identified the qualifications for a new president . . . [and] asked that the president have the ability to assemble a senior leadership team . . . [which] signaled the president would have to pick his staff, turnover the senior staff somewhat.” In this case, Carter’s ability to participate in the reflection phase was limited by political considerations.

Another participant, Landry, described the process at his institution as being highly confidential, which limited his participation in the development of a presidential

prospectus during this reflection phase of the presidential transition. He stated, “I felt like the inner circle would have more input.” Likewise, the community was not provided the opportunity to comment on the prospectus. Landry also reported that senior staff members were given the opportunity to review the prospectus for errors but not for further substantive input. Landry’s participation was limited during a process that was designed by decision-makers to be highly confidential.

Thus, the participants in this study described being involved in the reflection phase of the presidential transition process when they led and participated in institutional planning processes and when they helped build the presidential prospectus. Two participants reported that their involvement was limited by concerns about the confidential nature of the process and by political considerations stemming from issues at that institution. The participants’ experience provided examples of the way events on campus impacted decisions about the involvement of stakeholders in the reflection phase of the presidential transition process.

Theme 2: The Potential Impact of Formal Policy on the Presidential Transition Process

Organizational or system-wide policy is expected to communicate behavioral expectations for stakeholders. Two participants described the way policy and the policy process impacted the presidential transition process. One participant reported that a lack of policy influenced the type of organizational decision-making frames present at her institution. Another stated that the development of a policy development process allowed information to be communicated from one administration to another. This policy process influenced the type of decision-making frames present during the reflection phase of the

presidential transition process. Policy in this study refers to formal guidance or directives that set expectations for behavior at a college or university. As a result of that understanding, policy may be developed through various types of decision-making processes. The processes leading to the development of a formal policy may provide insight into the way decisions are made at the institution.

Eden described the way a lack of policy influenced the type of decision-making frames present at her institution during the reflection phase of the presidential transition process. Eden previously worked at a large public institution that had developed detailed policy about a number of campus issues and processes. She posited that those types of institutions are likely to have policy outlining the way a presidential selection and transition process should be handled. Eden also stated that a private institution “may have procedures or they may invent them each time.” It was also Eden’s opinion that her institution was one that lacked formal policy about the presidential transition process. Eden also disclosed that the president retiring at her institution had been in office for well over a decade and that the institution’s circumstances had changed dramatically. As a result of the time between presidential transitions and changes at the institution, the presidential search process was significantly different during the current transition. Eden described the current presidential search process as being closed and that faculty members were particularly frustrated with the lack of faculty representation on the search committee. Decision-makers acknowledged the frustrations of faculty members and added additional faculty to the search committee. When asked what type of decision-making models might have been present during the transition process, Eden stated lack of policy surrounding the presidential transition was indicative of a cultural decision-making

model. She continued, “There was never a discussion about what those procedures could or should be, . . . no [discussion] about how we refine those [processes] as we find out more.” Eden continued, “It [decision-making] was in everybody’s gut. . . . It was received wisdom.” In this case, a lack of detailed expectations outlined in policy left stakeholders searching for the best way to manage the process.

Another participant, Rory, described the development of explicit policy to help connect presidential administrations during this time of institutional transition. Rory stated that his institution was in the process of three major campus-planning processes and that the previous president left at the completion of the strategic planning process. Rory continued, “We had three projects [shared governance, strategic plan, and resource allocation] that were ongoing. . . . We made sure the next steps were clear so there were no questions about what the next steps were for the new president.” Rory said the goal of those processes was to proactively describe and define the different roles of campus stakeholders in the governance process:

Everyone comes to the table with different ideas: . . . “the faculty’s role is this,” . . . “the president’s role is this.” . . . We had a couple bumps along the way. . . . We [had] to get this down to make sure we were on the same page.

Rory continued that while they experienced “no major crises, 2 or 3 years ago there was a little bit of angst [and] we had to unpack that.” He also argued that academic leaders “have to make sure that in shared governance we write what we mean philosophically and that people have it up front when we make decisions to deal with the higher education challenges we see coming.” They developed policy and guidance because they “wanted to be proactive.” By leading discussions to formalize policy, Rory

was involved in the presidential transition process by formalizing the work of campus stakeholders so that it could continue during a new administration.

The experiences of Eden and Rory provide insight into the way formal policy can be used as a tool to codify expectations and ensure information passes from one institution to another. This policy can help colleges and universities meet the expectations as described by the AGB (2006), which argued that successful academic leadership “links the president, the faculty, and the board together in a well-functioning partnership purposefully devoted to a well-defined, broadly affirmed institutional vision” (p. vii). Policy, as described by Eden and Rory, may serve as a tool that “links” various stakeholders and administrations toward a singular “institutional vision” (AGB, 2006).

Summary of Participants’ Involvement in the Reflection Phase

The participants in this study described being actively involved in the reflection phase of the presidential transition process. Participation included involvement in institutional planning processes, the development of the presidential prospectus, and work that developed institutional policy to link the former and newly selected president. Participants reported their involvement was limited by concerns about the confidential nature of the process, by political considerations stemming from issues at that institution, and by lack of formal policy. Participants were able to exert leadership and be advocates for the academic program when they participated in formal campus-wide planning and policy development processes.

Phase 2 of the Presidential Transition Process: Selection

For purposes of this study, the selection phase of the presidential transition process is considered to be the specific process that leads to the selection of the new president. The participants described a traditional presidential search process as one where the search committee made up of stakeholders from numerous campus groups presented the board with their opinion about the best candidate and the board ultimately selected the new president. The number and type of stakeholders placed on the selection committee and the way presidential candidates were interviewed varied widely for the participants in this study. Senior academic leaders who participated in this study were involved in the actual selection process in various ways. Some senior academic leaders participated on the actual search committee, others provided informal input, some influenced the process by suggesting that certain faculty members serve on the search committee, and many senior academic leaders were formally interviewed by consultants to the search committee. Many senior academic leaders also had the opportunity to interview candidates during the process. Four senior academic leaders confided that they were candidates for the presidency at their institution. Their candidacies negatively impacted their ability to be involved in the selection phase of the transition process. Finally, nearly every participant described the way concerns about confidentiality impacted the selection phase of the presidential transition. Table 4.3 summarizes the involvement of the participants discussed in Themes 3 to 6.

Table 4.3
Participant Involvement in Phase 2: Selection

Activity	Participants
Participated in the formal search committee	Shelby, Jamie
Had concerns serving on the search committee/selecting supervisor	Casey, Avery, Blake
Did not serve on search committee because of religious nature of institution	Ryan
Did not serve on search committee because of political issues	Parker
Did not serve on the search committee/pleased with representatives	Reese, Rory
Did not serve on the search committee because of confidentiality concerns	Landry
Provided informal feedback, recruiting faculty for search committee	Carter, Parker, Morgan
Provided informal feedback to board chair	Avery, Reese
Participated in formal interviews of candidates	Avery, Harper, Morgan, Rory

Theme 3: Senior Academic Leaders' Participation in the Presidential Search

Committee

Of the 19 participants in this study, only two were on the formal search committee. When asked about her participation during the various phases of the presidential transition, Shelby stated immediately, “I did sit on the search committee for the new president and was involved in the production of the job description.” Likewise, Jamie stated that she was “on the search committee, . . . the committee that did the search and recommended the president to the board.”

Most participants were not part of the formal search committee during the selection phase of the presidential transition process. Some were not selected to be a part of the formal search committee, while three participants did not think it was appropriate to be a part of the selection. When discussing his involvement in the transition process, Casey stated that he did not want to be a part of picking his new boss. Similarly, Avery stated that she was not a part of the formal search committee, although someone who reported to her was a part of that committee. Avery stated that the board wanted no one

who reported directly to the president to be a part of the search committee. Blake stated, “I wasn’t too involved because one should not necessarily handpick one’s boss.”

Ryan stated that she was not part of the formal search team because of the nature of the institution. This particular search was different than the others described by participants because of the religious background of the institution. Ryan stated that “one of our objectives was to get a [religious leader from a particular background] . . . because it creates an identity.” Ryan continued that the institution also wanted a president “with extensive experience in higher education.” That “creates a challenge . . . [because] about a third of [similar religious institutions] have a layperson as president.” As a result of those specific desires from the campus community, the institution undertook an “insular process” that resulted in the recommendation committee working with the board to identify someone who fit those specific criteria. The person identified was invited to campus as the single formal candidate and was selected. The decision to conduct such a selection process fit the nature of the institution.

Another participant in the study, Parker, described a difficult political environment at his institution leading up to the presidential transition. He felt those circumstances likely prevented campus vice presidents from serving on the formal search committee. Parker felt his role was to protect the faculty and the academic mission even at his own professional expense. He stated, “My goal was to make sure the academic mission was represented and the faculty had a voice. . . . I knew that none of the vice presidents would be part of the search and I was okay with that, but I wanted the faculty there.” Parker continued by saying that he had informal communication with the board members and the consultants to help the selection and transition process. He stated, “My

role was to be an advocate, to advocate that the president of the faculty senate and vice president of the faculty senate had to be involved [if the search and transition was] to have any credibility with the faculty.” Parker provided an example of a senior academic leader who felt his or her role in the process was to be a representative who ensured the concerns of the faculty were considered by the search committee.

Two other participants described the way others served as representatives on the search committee. Reese stated that she was not included as a member of the formal presidential search committee. She stated, “It seemed a little unusual that the chief academic officer wouldn’t be a part of a presidential search. . . . Maybe they thought I couldn’t look [at the process] objectively.” Reese continued by stating that while only one senior administrator was on the formal search committee, she was pleased that two faculty members were involved. Likewise, Rory stated that while he was not a member of the formal presidential search committee, a cabinet member represented the senior administrative staff and the search committee did have faculty representation.

Another participant, Landry, stated that neither he nor any of the other senior administrators were members of the formal search committee at his institution. Landry described that particular search as being very closed. He also noted that the faculty on the formal committee played an important role in describing the decisions made during the search process and ultimately garnering support for the newly selected president. Landry stated the faculty on the search committee “played an extremely important role in introducing the person by credentials” because the faculty, like the senior administrative staff, did not get a chance to meet with the newly selected president during the selection phase of the transition process.

In summary, of the 19 senior academic leaders who participated in this study, only two participated on the formal search committee. Other senior academic leaders did not participate because of concerns about picking a supervisor, cultural concerns that shaped the selection process, and political considerations at the time of the transition process. Four participants who did not participate on the formal search committee stated that though they were not a part of the search, it was exceptionally important to have faculty representation on the formal search committee. Each of those four participants made that point without being asked such a question directly. The participants described how involvement of a person or group provides a symbol indicating involvement in the decision-making process. These experiences are consistent with Birnbaum's conclusions. He wrote, "The committee also serves as a symbol that permits various constituencies to display or enhance their status within the organization. . . . Serious conflict can result when a committee is formed or operates in a manner inconsistent with the expectations of important constituencies" (Birnbaum, 1988b, p. 494). In the cases described by the participants, there was great concern that whether or not the senior academic leader participated, the academic program was represented. The participation of those in the academic program may add legitimacy to the process and associated decisions.

Theme 4: Senior Academic Leaders' Informal Input to Formal Decision-Makers

A number of participants in this study described providing informal feedback to board members and other decision-makers during the selection phase of the presidential transition process. Parker stated that some board members reached out to him "to get a read on what was going on," essentially to see how decisions would be perceived by those stakeholder groups. Parker felt his role was to be a representative of the voice of

the faculty: “My role was to be an advocate, to advocate that the president of the faculty senate and vice president of the faculty senate [were] involved.” Parker posited that those two leaders had to be involved with the search process “to have any credibility with the faculty.” Similarly, Carter was not part of the formal search committee, but was consulted about which faculty members should be involved in the search process. He advocated that the committee have representation from all four of the institution’s academic components. Carter stated, “When I was asked to bring faculty on, I said you have to think of multiples of four. . . . [One academic component] always feel left out. . . . At first they balked. . . . The board chair came back and reconsidered and they did have four” faculty representatives on the search committee. Like both Carter and Parker, Morgan stated that he was involved during this phase “recruiting faculty members” to serve on the search committee. Parker, Carter, and Morgan exerted informal leadership by providing informal feedback about faculty representation on the formal search committee.

Both Avery and Reese reported talking directly with the board chairman about the search. Avery stated, “The head of the search committee came to eat lunch with me to get my thoughts. [It was] an informal conversation.” Avery continued, “The chair of the board called me to talk about my opinion of the candidates. . . . They never would have selected someone he didn’t approve of.” Reese “identified some mechanical flaws” in the way input was being collected from stakeholders during the process, which called into question “the integrity of the process.” Reese stated, “The board chair called me and said, ‘I sense that you feel we are trying to drive the bus and not bringing any passengers with us.’” Reese responded, “Well, when you see this, this, and this happen, how could

one not feel like that?” She said that the board chair agreed, and “I think things got better after that.” Reese continued that decision-makers “might have gone into this process thinking they could have fast-tracked some of these processes, but they found there could be some real pushback.” Reese concluded by saying that decision-makers “found out that if they didn’t have integrity in the process, the selectee could lose some legitimacy.”

Both Avery and Reese exerted leadership when providing informal feedback and serving as representatives of the academic program to the board chairs at their institutions.

The participants who discussed providing informal feedback were involved in efforts to ensure the selection process was seen as fair and legitimate among faculty members and in so doing ensure the president selected was seen as legitimate in order to protect the institution’s academic integrity. The formal and informal input of the senior academic leaders helped add legitimacy to the process. Those senior academic leaders had the ability to explain decision-making if they were involved in garnering additional support for a decision. Senior academic leaders were also able to serve as advocates for the academic program during discussions that took place during this selection phase of the presidential transition process.

Theme 5: Senior Academic Leaders’ Participation in Formal Interviews of Presidential Candidates

During a traditional search and selection process, numerous campus members are invited to meet with the finalists. These interviews or conversations allow all involved to feel a sense of engagement with the process and provide a way for the decision-makers to receive feedback and vet the candidates. Senior academic leaders may be in a position to

provide a great deal of substantive input while adding legitimacy because of their symbolic position.

A number of senior academic leaders reported conducting interviews with the candidates or consultants to the presidential search. Avery stated that he participated in “hour-long interviews with each of the four finalists [while] they were on campus for 2 days each.” Harper stated that his institution went through two iterations of a search process before successfully identifying a candidate. During the first search, “I had the privilege to have some private time with both [candidates] to get to know them, . . . to answer and ask questions.” During the second search, Harper met with the search consultants, as this search was held much more confidentially. Morgan and Rory also reported having individual interviews, while Blake stated he “was one of the few people who had individual sessions with those who were chosen for an on-campus interview. . . . I had 30 or 45 minutes with each candidate.” In the cases described by the participants, the inclusion of senior academic leaders in the formal interview process showed candidates that the concerns of the academic program were valued. This is consistent with the conclusions of Birnbaum (1988b), who indicated that the composition of a search committee provides to a candidate a set of “normative expectations” about the “interaction and influence of campus constituencies” (p. 495). In this case, the inclusion of senior academic leaders in the interview process was a sign of respect for the academic program.

Theme 6: The Impact of Confidentiality Concerns on the Presidential Transition Process

Table 4.4 summarizes participants’ concerns related to confidentiality.

Table 4.4
Confidentiality Concerns

Concern	Participants
Candidates risk relationships if made public	Eden, Shelby, Cameron, Harper, Mason
Closed searches were first for institution	Elliot, Harper, Landry, Reese
Closed searches may cause anxiety	Reese, Mason
Closed searches may be risky	Eden
Size of institution and connection to transparency of search	Shelby, Parker
Type of search/involvement of stakeholders	Harper, Avery, Elliot, Blake, Reese, Pat
Best practices discussion	Blake, Rory, Reese

The decision to make the presidential search process confidential was a theme that emerged during conversations with the participants in this study. A confidential or closed search is one in which an institution does not publicly identify candidates for the position. The interviews are conducted in private, and the stakeholders in the community do not have the ability to provide input about the candidates. The community is not informed about the candidates until the newly selected president is publicly announced. An open search would solicit input from stakeholders about final candidates identified by the search committee. Six of the 19 participants in this study described the presidential search process at their institution as open, and 11 of the participants described the process as closed. Two of the institutions went through two searches before selecting a president. In both circumstances, the initial search was open and the second search was closed.

The participants described strengths and weaknesses of both a transparent process and a closed process. If the process is closed, more candidates may apply for the position because they will be able to apply without risking their standing at their current position. As a result of an increased number of candidates, the candidate pool may be strengthened. An open and transparent process, where finalists are named and publicly

vetted by stakeholders in the community, may help candidates develop relationships with the community, increasing engagement among stakeholders and improving the vetting of the selected president. Eden summarized the possible spectrum of confidentiality:

They [searches] run the spectrum. . . . There are some public universities that get to the point where the nominations portal from the get-go is public. There are hybrids in between where you have a closed initial process, nominations are confidential, but when finalists are identified and brought to campus it then becomes live. On campus there will be town hall or general types of events where everyone can come and meet the candidates and the selection is made. The argument for a closed process is that most leading candidates are people who are active elsewhere. There is a delicacy in getting involved. If it gets out, it can be destabilizing. . . . It needs to be quiet until they announce they are leaving. The ones [candidates] you want are the ones who aren't looking. . . . They are busy for their day jobs. . . . It is going to take effort to get attention. The other spectrum is the public where everything is open [because of] sunshine laws.

A number of participants described how candidates might be hesitant to apply for the position if the search is made public. Shelby, who was a member of the formal search committee, stated, "We had candidates who were in highly sensitive situations and that wasn't compromised as far as I know" because of the discretion of the members of the search committee. Cameron added, "Many of the candidates have to be very careful, particularly at a public university. . . . If their name gets out they are looking, they will be at risk of losing their job. . . . Confidentiality is very important." Harper concurred: "What we discovered in the first search was that presidents at other institutions weren't willing to risk their relationships with their trustees. . . . They would pull out when something [about the search] would come out." Harper concluded by saying that in "closed searches you might be more successful of attracting a broader set of candidates." Mason offered, "It's hard to declare your candidacy for a school and then not get selected."

One participant described the way a closed search may hinder the development of relationships between the new president and the community. When discussing the connection between the presidential transition process and the development of relationships between the newly selected president and the community, Harper responded that in a closed search it is “true that the person chosen and the community don’t get to know each other; . . . they have to start that relationship from scratch. . . . It’s also hard for the president not to have a mutual understanding of the situation.” A closed process is a lost opportunity to develop relationships, which McLaughlin (1996) noted was so critical to the success of a presidency.

Elliot, Harper, Landry, and Reese stated that their institutions went through a closed presidential search for the first time in the institution’s history. Elliot said, “This was the first time that this community had experienced [a presidential search] that was utterly in confidence. . . . The slate of finalists was not made public. . . . I think that is increasingly common.” Harper stated that the search that led to her institution selecting its new president was closed, which differed from the norm. Harper stated, “It is traditional at our institution going back at least as far as I can recall the candidates would come back to campus and meet with many groups. [That was] pretty traditional.” Landry described a similar situation and stated that the process “was tough because our college had never had a confidential search before. . . . What it meant was the finalists would not do a formal presentation before the faculty.” Reese offered that she had experiences similar to those provided by Elliot, Harper, and Landry. In each case the participants stated that their institutions had a presidential selection process characterized

as closed for the first time. Reese stated that this new level of confidentiality was jarring to the campus:

At every other level of hiring at this institution, people have the ability to talk to others. This seemed so foreign to our experience . . . that we would wake up and see who the new president would be. But quite frankly until the last [immediate past] president [selected less than 5 years ago], that's the way [an open search] it had always been done on this campus, . . . but until then we had always had president that served 16 or 18 years. . . . This latest search was closed and everyone woke up and saw who was appointed and was anxious to see who the new boss would be.

Like Reese, Mason stated the search process produced “anxiety” among faculty members. At Mason’s institution, the newly selected president was a prominent public figure with deep ties to the institution and community. The search that brought this president to campus was closed. While stakeholders were excited and “wowed” to have someone so prominent become president, Mason opined that the traditional selection processes had to be “altered” because of the person’s public position. As a result, there was “a smaller group doing the vetting and making the decision really for the leader of a campus than there may have been in the past.” Mason stated that some of the anxiety from faculty came from the fact that the newly selected president had not previously worked in academia. As a result, “the faculty [were] listening and watching carefully.” Mason offered that the faculty wanted to know if the new president’s “steep learning curve” would necessitate “changes in pursuit of enrollment that might hurt academic quality or [that the new president] won’t recognize shared governance processes and faculty’s academic freedom.” Mason reported the faculty wondered, ““What does [the new president] know about higher education?’ . . . ‘What does [the new president] know about the academy?’” Had the faculty had an opportunity to publicly vet the candidate,

their anxiety may have been lessened, as those in academia “process things” according to Mason.

Eden evaluated potential concerns of faculty members stemming from closed presidential searches and, like Reese and Mason, identified possible misgivings. Eden used the term “risk” to describe the associated phobia. Eden was asked if there was a connection between the transparency of a presidential search and the way a president might interact with stakeholders. Eden replied, “It’s certainly a possible outcome and certainly a risk. . . . The way then that risk could manifest is a failure to connect with on-campus constituencies.” Eden made the point that a lack of transparency during a presidential transition process risked the ability of a newly selected president to develop relationships with stakeholders.

Two participants, Shelby and Parker, noted that the size of their institutions impacted the way the search was conducted. Shelby reported, “We are like many small schools in that three candidates came to campus and gave talks. . . . When we got to that level, all confidentiality was gone.” Shelby opined, “I think we are typical of small schools but some bigger schools don’t have any transparency but we did.” When asked if the process that led to the president’s hiring influenced the way he or she governed once in office, Parker concurred and agreed with Shelby that the size of the institution should influence the nature of the selection process. Parker stated:

I agree with the hypothesis. . . . Remember, I am a faculty member, and we believe we should be involved in these processes. . . . That’s an important part of building community. . . . The other presidents I have worked with over the years were all about having a community. If this was [a large university] and 40,000 people were involved, I don’t know how it works, . . . but in a smaller institution your hypothesis is correct. To bring in a president to be positioned to have success requires this kind of a[n] [open] process. In the new president’s playbook

has to be some insistence that they emerge from this kind of process or they come from way behind.

The experiences described by Shelby and Parker may indicate that smaller institutions or those with a culture that values a sense of community or a collegial atmosphere may need a more transparent presidential search process so that the process matches the campus governance style. This is consistent with the findings of Balser and Carmin (2009), who argued that the transition process may be difficult for all types of organizations but especially for those driven by their missions and values. As a result, decision-makers at smaller institutions and ones “driven by missions and values” should be sensitive “to employees’ interpretations of organizational identity, the extent to which these interpretations are collectively shared, and how proposed changes may be regarded by different subgroups as threats to organizational identity” (Balser & Carmin, 2009, p. 186).

The simple goal of any presidential search is to produce a president who will be the best leader for the institution. Importantly, some participants noted that neither an open nor a closed search would definitively provide the institution with the best possible candidate; ultimately, process was less important than outcome. Harper noted, “What you learn is that each of these stories is a story with unique elements, not necessarily able to apply in other circumstances.” Avery offered that no matter how transparent the process, stakeholders “feel you were effectively heard only if your preferred candidate is chosen.” Elliot commented about her institution, “They [faculty] were pleased certainly with the outcome and therefore I suppose with the process.” Some participants stated that hiring the right leader was the most important part of the selection process. Blake added, “People always want more access than they might reasonably expect.” It is

reasonable to infer from the participants' experiences that stakeholders may enjoy a completely transparent presidential search but ultimately disagree with a decision.

Reese provided a great description of the benefits of an open search. She objectively stated that open processes in the past at her institution "didn't necessarily produce the best candidate." Pat provided a similar experience and agreed that a perfect search may or may not bring the campus the best candidate:

The ones [searches] I have seen with most successful are when you have a committee of staff, faculty, board, students who talk a lot about the type of person they want, ultimately the board is going to do what they want to do. I was on a committee at another college. I thought we made the right choice, and it turns out we made a terrible choice. I thought a lot about what I did there. The [president] we chose was the most popular among students, board, faculty, and staff. I don't think it was a process issue; . . . you are never quite sure about people.

Taken together, the experiences described by Harper, Avery, Elliot, Blake, and Pat indicate that while the presidential transition process is important, selecting a president with the ability to move the institution forward is critical, as no process can engage all stakeholders to the degree they would hope and some may be more impressive candidates than leaders.

Blake, Reese, and Mason described experiences that may inform practice. Blake noted that confidentiality is "an increasing tension [and] we continue to evolve." The candidates provided examples of best practices to deal with that evolution so that confidentiality concerns are balanced with the collection and use of stakeholder opinions so the process is viewed as legitimate. Blake stated that when dealing with these concerns, institutions "have to be true to their missions and cultures." Rory offered that the process was completely confidential for candidates until 24 hours prior to their arrival for their public campus interviews. Only then were names and curricula vitae made

public. Such a hybrid model balances the needs of the candidates to protect their current position while allowing the search to benefit from stakeholder input. Candidates who became one of three finalists may feel much less risk in applying for a presidency and interviewing publicly than they might if names were made public during the initial application process. Reese also provided a number of best practices to increase legitimacy during a closed process:

What was important in that circumstance was for the search committee and the board of trustees to report out the integrity of the process behind the scenes. [They should describe] how thorough the search firm was, how the vetting worked, . . . [the fact that] those involved were doing it with a high degree of engagement. [At the president's institution] . . . there was a selling of the integrity of the process after the fact. . . . Part of it was educating the community why there was a need to keep it closed. If that is the route, you have to explain that this will produce a wider pool of more qualified candidates. . . . You have to announce that it's a closed search as early as possible. You don't want to wake up and find out that there has been a search going on.

Reese stated that the development of legitimacy after the process is dependent on the ability of decision-makers to develop relationships and trust with stakeholders. She offered, "There are some institutions where maybe there is not a level of trust. . . . We don't have faith in the board or the search committee members to do what is best for the university. . . . It's a case-by-case situation." Mason offered similar sentiments and stated that if decision-makers choose to have a closed process, "it requires the board is really informed about the institution so it can make a good choice for the institution. . . . I think that increase[s] the need for board engagement and accountability."

In summary, participants offered that delaying the public announcement of candidates as long as possible, communicating extensively about all decision-making associated with the process, helping decision-makers develop a sense of stakeholder

concerns and aspirations, and connecting the decision-making to existing organizational culture may add legitimacy to the presidential selection process.

Summary of Participants' Involvement in the Selection Phase

Participants were involved in the actual selection process in various ways. Two of 19 senior academic leaders participated on the actual search committee, others provided informal input, some influenced the process by suggesting certain faculty members serve on the search committee, and many senior academic leaders were formally interviewed by consultants to the search committee. Many senior academic leaders also had the opportunity to interview candidates during the process. Four senior academic leaders were candidates for the presidency at their institution. Their candidacies negatively impacted their ability to be involved in the selection phase of the transition process. Finally, nearly every participant described the way concerns about confidentiality impacted the selection phase of the presidential transition. Participants offered insights into whether the process was ultimately more important than the outcome and discussed best practices to deal with concerns about confidentiality.

Phase 3 of the Presidential Transition Process: Onboarding

The onboarding phase of the presidential transition traditionally spans the time from when the new president is selected through when the president has thoroughly learned about the institution and the issues and challenges it has prioritized. This phase may take a full academic year. Study participants indicated that they were involved heavily in helping to develop relationships during this phase of the presidential transition process. They reported that they spent a great deal of time providing the newly selected

president with the information needed to learn about the issues facing the institution and helping the new president develop relationships with all stakeholders while fostering a sense of teamwork among the senior administrative team as they served in a new administration. The participants also outlined the role of the previous president and how he or she may help or hinder efforts of the new president to navigate a new presidency. In addition, participants described the way academic tenure allowed senior academic leaders to speak more candidly, in comparison with colleagues who led nonacademic administrative components, during this phase of the transition process. Participants concluded by describing ways the entire presidential transition process may impact the success of a presidency. Table 4.5 summarizes participants' main points of discussion relating to this phase, as discussed in Themes 7 to 10.

Table 4.5
Participant Involvement in Phase 3: Onboarding

Discussion point	Participants
Role to facilitate relationship development	Jordan, Morgan, Ryan, Harper, Landry, Rory, Elliot, Payton, Pat, Jamie, Casey, Blake
Involvement of the immediate past president	Landry, Avery, Parker, Harper
Tenure and the ability to speak freely	Reese, Avery, Mason
Transparency and the ability to develop relationships	Eden, Shelby, Pat, Avery, Morgan, Carter, Landry

Theme 7: The Role of Senior Academic Leaders in Facilitating Relationship Development

A number of study participants stated they were involved in this phase of the presidential transition process by providing information to the newly selected president. Senior academic leaders provided information in writing and in person. They were

intentional about providing the new president with contextual information to help the president wade through cultural issues.

Three participants noted that personal and professional experiences helped the newly selected president gain an understanding of pressing issues in the new role. Jordan stated, “I worked with the new president before [she] arrived. . . . I prepared a tremendous amount of information for [her].” Jordan also reported engaging in a series of meetings with the newly selected president. Similarly, Morgan stated, “I’ve been here for 31 years; I have a lot of institutional knowledge. My job was to provide [the new president] that knowledge that [he] didn’t have access to.” He continued, “I provided him with a briefing book. . . . I gave him basic info on all academic programs, . . . SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats] in each program, . . . as much as I could.” Morgan also reported that he sought to offer the new president as much “context” as possible. Ryan stated that they spent “several months going through every facet of the academic sector; . . . at every meeting it was ‘let me tell you about this group and what they do.’” These three participants exerted leadership by serving as representatives of the academic program to the newly selected president.

Harper reported that the new president “came to campus a few times. We emailed back and forth and [the new president] started July 1, and we began a series of regularly scheduled meetings.” Landry had similar experiences and stated that he and his fellow senior administrators used the onboarding phase to exert leadership and provide the newly selected president with information they felt he should have. Landry described his involvement this way:

We were very intentional [about providing the new president with information]. We looked at ACE [American Council on Education], looked for articles, got a

timeline to look at things to know who gets to know when. We had conversations about how we were going to do this. We decided each of the five vice presidents would write about our divisions. We decided we wouldn't overwhelm him a narrative—with some key points. We bought him an iPad and loaded it on there. We gave him a sense of our issues, so he could look at that before he started. He was very data driven. It was important for us to be able to put our perspective on it.

Rory also stated that he often provided information to the newly selected president in person. He stated:

My office is right next door to the president's. We have a formal meeting once a week. . . . I'm in his office multiple times a day offering him short tidbits about the institution, or he is coming in asking for stuff: "Tell me about this, give me the history behind it." [The process] is pretty fluid with him learning the institution, trying to develop goals for the academic year.

Rory also stated that he helped the new president understand and participate in symbolic duties central to the institution's culture. Rory described the way he helped the new president participate in important campus traditions: he "served root beer floats to the marching bands with me; . . . he's done the stuff that is required. . . . [He hosted] a picnic at his house." Rory also reported that the new president "doesn't really know what is sacred and not sacred now." By providing the newly selected president with information those in the academic program thought the new president needed and assisting a president through important symbolic events, the participants were helping a president become socialized to the new campus culture. Socialization to an institution and its stakeholders is important because "disagreement" with stakeholders is not a "political event for many presidents, it is also a problem of identity—and a surprise" (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 25). That "surprise" may prevent presidents from making considered and thoughtful decisions.

Two participants reported that previous professional and personal experiences helped the new president understand pressing campus issues quickly. Elliot reported that she and the new president had “hours of discussion about the needs of the faculty, . . . what their needs were in terms of resources of all kinds.” They also had conversations about “fundamental things like how our enrollment was spaced over our curriculum, how our curriculum evolved to the point it is now, the shape of our majors and general education.” Elliot also offered that the newly selected president at her institution had previously been a provost at another selective liberal arts college. Elliot was asked if that experience made the new president more understanding of the needs of the faculty and the provost in particular. Elliot replied the following way:

Yes, absolutely. . . . I can’t tell you what the experience was like for the chief advancement officer; they may have had the same impression. I certainly didn’t have to spell everything out for [him]. I didn’t have to spend a lot of time explaining things or spelling out the lay of the land.

Payton offered that the newly selected president had a deep understanding of the institution because of his experience as a parent of a student at that university and his participation on the institution’s board of trustees. Those experiences helped ease the transition. Payton stated, “The new president knew the institution quite well. . . . It was just a pretty easy transition.” As a result, “I just kind of updated her and made myself available to [the new president] about the cultural issues.” The professional and personal experiences described by Elliot and Payton provided the newly selected presidents with insight into the institution’s culture, relationships with stakeholders, and the issues facing the institutions and helped them avoid the “surprises” feared by Cohen and March (1974).

Two other participants offered that their institutions hired presidents with previous experience at the college or university. In those two instances, the senior

academic leaders reported those previous experiences with the institution did not lead to the smooth transition and understanding of the issues facing the institution as expected. Pat reported that the newly selected president came to office after a closed and quick search. The candidate had deep personal and professional connections to the institution. The new president was hired by the board because “they felt they would lose the positive momentum” of the previous administration. The expectations of the board were not fully realized, according to Pat, who described the decision-making process this way:

A new president wouldn't have to spend a year getting to know the institution, the donors, etc. It was supposed to be smoother than [it would have been if] someone [who did not have the experience with the institution was selected]. It was assumed that because [the new president had deep experience with the institution], he was simply going to keep the same people and things would run like normal. Instead, it was the opposite.

Jamie described experiences similar to Pat's and reported that there was more change than expected as a result of the new president's previous experience with the institution. Jamie argued that the newly selected president took the onboarding process for granted because of his previous experience with the institution. Had the newly selected president spent more time “learning the community” and the “culture of the faculty,” the transition may have gone more smoothly. Jamie offered that the newly selected president did not enjoy much of a transition process despite the deep connection to the institution. Jamie also stated the following:

The president believed that he, rightly or wrongly, that he knew a great deal about the college because [he had that connection]. Once he got there, he came with many ideas and began to implement them. I think the person needed to spend more time learning the community before implementing his preconceived notions. The fact that he had [a deep connection to the institution] didn't really allow him to understand the culture of the faculty and administration. That was my concern. . . . I think he would have helped the community if he would have spent more time listening and less time talking.

The experiences described by Pat and Jamie provide evidence that socialization may help a newly selected president develop relationships with stakeholders, and a new president must be intentional about understanding the community and the nuances of its culture.

A number of participants described the onboarding process as an important opportunity to develop relationships and establish a sense of teamwork among senior leaders. Casey stated that he viewed presidential transition not just from a personal standpoint, but also as an important time to establish teamwork among the senior staff. Harper offered, “The way a president works with his administrative team is shaped from the outset.” Parker stated that in working with the president during the onboarding phase, the role of the cabinet “was to make sure the right voices were being heard . . . to make sure they weren’t disenfranchised.” Parker stated that at his institution the onboarding process “was managed” and as a result “we [senior leaders] were a stronger team with a clear purpose.”

After assessing their experience during the onboarding phase of the presidential transition process, three candidates described the way senior academic leaders needed to take a leadership role, intentionally prioritizing issues for the newly selected president. Harper reported, “If I had to do it over again, I would have taken less for granted. . . . I would have offered more advice more frequently. All of these stories are stories [the new president] didn’t recognize. . . . We didn’t take that more seriously.” The newly selected president Ryan worked with came from academia but not directly from the “academic sector,” as the previous professional focus had been student life and administration.

Ryan stated he used the onboarding process as an opportunity to teach the new president about the academic component and offered the following:

I used it as an educational opportunity, saying, “These are the goals and outcomes that we pursue.” Having worked in higher education, it wasn’t a foreign language for him; it was just a different context. That meant there was learning about things like promotion and tenure, curricular design, accreditation, . . . some big things facilitated by this office. When you get a new president, it’s really the charge to be the coach and to tell them everything they possibly know, . . . the status of the projects, the status of the sector. . . . You are really teaching them about the institution.

Ryan also stated that this educational process was especially important given the authority of the president. A new president is ultimately responsible for numerous people, processes, and decisions made long before they were selected and placed in office. Ryan opined that it’s “really your job” to give them information. You can’t just “expect them to know.” Ryan continued:

You can’t leave details out and say, “Oops, I should have told you that.” [The goal is] really trying to give them clarity in the new contextual world. The president is accountable for all the actions at the university. That’s why it’s imperative so at least there is an awareness [on the part of a new president].

Like Ryan, Blake stated that the onboarding process was an opportunity for the institution’s senior academic leader to provide campus-wide leadership by helping the transition go as smoothly as possible. Blake reported:

I think any [senior academic leader’s] job in the process is to make good on the institutional investment in hiring the new leader. I think the [senior academic leader’s] job in part is to help that new leader acclimate and acculturate and to support him or her to ensure an effective and seamless transition. You are trying to look out for the best interests of the institution and specifically the academic area when you are working with a new leader.

The experiences of Casey, Parker, Ryan, and Blake describe the way senior academic leaders exerted leadership by providing newly selected presidents with information needed when beginning a presidency.

In summary, a number of senior academic leaders who participated in this study stated they were involved in this phase of the presidential transition process by providing information to the newly selected president. Information was provided in writing and in person. Previous personal and professional experiences helped newly selected presidents become socialized in the new environment more quickly than they would have without that experience. Participants were intentional about exerting leadership and providing new presidents with contextual information to help them wade through cultural issues.

Theme 8: The Involvement of the Immediate Past President in the Presidential Transition Process

Without being asked directly or prompted, participants in this study described ways the immediate past president may help or hinder transition efforts. Those past presidents helped transition efforts by providing space and support for senior administrators to plan and prepare information for a newly selected president. They also hindered efforts by attempting to influence the actual selection process or by making decisions or creating an atmosphere on campus that affected the work of the newly selected president.

Landry described a positive way the sitting president at his institution was able to impact the transition process. This president suggested that Landry attend a leadership conference at a nearby research university and then provided the time and space for

Landry and other senior leaders to prepare for the transition. Landry described the president's involvement this way:

The year before my president left, he suggested I attend a leadership program at a nearby research university. At that forum we had a lot of conversations about presidential transitions. In our group more than one third were either recently through [a transition] or were starting [one]. I worked hard to get ideas about the [transition] process.

Once the transition process had formally started, Landry developed a timeline with all that needed to occur and asked the sitting president for time in cabinet meetings to work with other senior administrators on the transition. Landry told the sitting president, "We need some council time on our own. . . . We don't want to hurt your feelings." He described the response this way, "It was delicate but he accepted it with grace that he always did. . . . [His acceptance of the request allowed the cabinet to be] very intentional about how we would bring [the new president] on board."

Other participants reported that sitting presidents were less helpful with the transition. Avery reported that her sitting president impacted the transition process by creating negative feelings on campus, which impacted the skill sets stakeholders were looking for in a new leader. Avery explained the reasons for the previous president's unpopularity this way:

The previous president had been here for over [15 years] and burned a lot of bridges. [The previous president was] largely unpopular with the faculty for focusing too much on the budget and not on the academic program. . . . [The previous president had been] extremely successful budget-wise building up our endowment with almost unprecedented speed.

This experience is an example of frustrations stemming from tension between academic values and market values. Avery went on to describe the way that tension impacted campus stakeholders.

That sort of singular devotion to endowment build up caused hard feelings with faculty [and] administrators. . . . It wasn't just about the money. . . . He had become quite gloomy about everything and higher education in general. There are a lot of dark clouds. . . . People were looking for a president who was more upbeat and positive.

Parker and Harper described previous presidents' impacting the sharing of information in the onboarding process because they were unhappy that their preferred candidates were not chosen as successors. Parker reported, "It was clear [the previous president] had an agenda to get [his] assistant named as the next president." When that person wasn't selected, the current president began "cutting off information" to the newly selected president. Parker also shared that the sitting president was able to build a "transition team which consisted of the one person [he] wanted to be president. . . . He forbid contact from the rest of us." This led the president-elect to communicate that the planned campus visits where she would meet with the single-person transition team "were not worth [the] time to come back," as the visits didn't meet the new president's intent "to map out visits to campus where [the new president] would begin the onboarding process." Parker also reported the new president had "continual struggles" to get the previous president out of campus business that first year. Parker opined that the previous president had become "insecure" and "obsessed with [his] legacy." Similarly, Harper reported the previous president impacted the onboarding process for the newly selected president. Harper provided the following:

The onboarding process was very substandard and it left [the new president] behind when he got here. The outgoing president was upset his preferred candidate was not selected. [The previous president] didn't have much to do with the new president, and he could have been helpful but he wasn't. Once he left office, he should have been pretty silent. The processes could have been much better.

Parker noted that the board had an important role to play to ensure the newly selected president received as much information as needed and that others were helpful during the onboarding process. He argued, “Trustees must understand what is going on on campus. . . . They can’t just blindly listen to what they are hearing from the [sitting] president.”

In summary, former presidents had the ability to help the newly selected president access the needed information to inform early decisions in the presidency or make that process more difficult, according to the participants in this study. The board of trustees had an important role to play to ensure the newly selected president received the information needed.

Theme 9: Senior Academic Leaders’ Status as Tenured Faculty Members and the Corresponding Ability to Speak Candidly About the Transition Process

A number of participants stated that because they had earned tenure, they felt as if they had additional freedom to speak candidly during the presidential transition process. Senior academic leaders felt that they could provide honest feedback without the fear of losing employment. However, other senior leaders, like the chief financial officer or the chief advancement officer, could not earn that same benefit because of their status as administrators. Reese described the benefits of tenure this way:

Remember, I am a tenured member of an academic department. Even though we are going through a transition, I know I’m not going to be thrown out on the street unemployed. He or she might decide they don’t want me as chief academic officer, but I still have a job in my department. . . . My anxiety level about the process would be lower than other vice presidents. I felt free to go toe to toe with the board member, and I don’t know that any other vice presidents would be bold enough to do so.

Avery described a very similar experience:

I retained my tenure. I was very frank with him early on and where things were on campus and where they should move, and most provosts are very frank with those things. I retained my tenure and didn't think I'd stay on; I had very little to lose by saying here is what I think. Other administrators who don't have that have to be much more guarded. If you would be viewed as incompatible or don't have the same vision, you can be put out to pasture if you don't have that [faculty] position to go back to.

One participant described the way a lack of tenure reinforced structural hierarchy.

Mason disclosed that he did not have tenure in his current position. Mason described the relationship with the new president this way: "What I have learned is that the president is the commander and I am a lieutenant. . . . If I am not in position to follow his orders, I am the one who leaves, not him." Mason was then asked the following question: "During this research, a number in this position [senior academic leaders] have told me that they felt more free to speak up because they had tenure. Is that true in your case?" Mason responded, "Interesting, that wouldn't be that way for me. My discipline was [left out to protect participant anonymity], . . . [which] I left in 1998 to go into administration, and everything has changed so much. . . . So I'd have to leave."

Thus, participants in this study described the way tenure may provide senior academic leaders with freedom to speak candidly during the onboarding phase of the presidential transition process. This freedom lessens the power differential between the senior academic leadership and the newly selected president and provides an important voice for the academic program.

Theme 10: Impact of the Presidential Transition Process on the Success of the Presidency

Participants in this study reported that the nature of the transition process might impact the presidency. A search that included many stakeholders may help a newly selected president develop relationships with those in the community. Those stakeholders may feel more engaged with a new administration if they feel their voices were heard during such an important institutional process. Eden offered that a campus took a “risk” when conducting a presidential transition process that did not seek out and value input from stakeholders. That risk could manifest itself if the newly selected president demonstrated a “failure to connect with on-campus constituencies.”

Two participants described the way the presidential transition process impacted the initial stages of a presidency. Shelby reported that her institution brought finalists to campus to give public presentations. Shelby stated those conversations and “that transparency” gave the newly selected president “a firm foundation.” Shelby continued, “I can guarantee you that if that search had not been as transparent as it was, it would have been a big political difficulty for anyone coming in.” Pat offered a similar characterization of the search at her institution. Pat described the search as “closed and bureaucratic” which “isn’t characteristic” of the normal way the institution went about making decisions. Pat warned that even as the search was not “inclusive or democratic,” there are “things you need to do to give legitimacy to the process.” Pat argued that if the board had handled the transition process differently, “I think the transition would have been easier for the campus and the first year would have been better.”

Avery, too, described the way the transition process impacted the initial stages of the presidency. When Avery was asked if she “thought there was a connection between the process and the way the president has performed in office,” she responded: “I would say absolutely yes. By really taking that substantial amount of time and doing that listening, asking for advice, he built up a lot of social capital on campus, political capital.”

Another participant described how an inclusive transition process helped the newly selected president enjoy support from the community. Morgan reported that it took her institution two search processes to successfully identify and select a new president. The searches were conducted in the aftermath of political difficulty on campus. The first process was open and transparent, while the second was closed. Morgan reported that during the second selection process one candidate was identified and no public events were conducted. Morgan also stated, during the second search process, “There weren’t multiple candidates or vet them. . . . It was ‘we [the board] listened and this is what we are going to do.’ . . . Had they not picked the right person, it could have gone very badly. They did pick the right person.” The participant was asked whether the president described as the “right person” would have received the same level of support if he had been brought in before the first three candidates. Morgan responded, “I think it would have been different. I think the campus needed to have the opportunity for, no matter how good [the candidate], there had to be a sense that they were part of the process.” In short, Morgan indicated that the process mattered in this case. Stakeholders described what they hoped for in a new president during the first search and were listened to when the new president was selected in the second search, so the transition process

went more smoothly. A process that allowed stakeholders to engage helped the president selected garner more support from stakeholders.

Similarly, Carter described the way the board used a presidential transition process to bring the community together:

This [transition process] was an opportunity to heal and bring people together. It was collegial and broad based. People felt empowered in that way. It was also political in that the trustees tried to do whatever they could to please the faculty. The board felt they hung in for too long with the old president, so [this time] “Let’s listen to them.”

The experience describes the way a presidential transition process can benefit the entire community rather than just the specific people involved. If a presidential transition process can benefit many stakeholders, it may be most helpful when as many stakeholders are involved as possible.

Landry also described the way process might impact the success of a presidency. He offered, “As I reflect back, I think what is interesting, you might have had a very similar conversation [with someone] who wasn’t a chief academic officer.” This may mean that the academic program was treated no differently than other campus components, which may create additional tension between administrative and academic components. Landry described the way that tension may play out and how it may be lessened:

The president has to win over the faculty one way or another, and this sort of a process puts a president at a disadvantage. . . . If [a new president] does something in the first month that goes against faculty, he will be challenged. Process isn’t everything, but it is an interesting element that you are discovering. If the outcome wasn’t right, the concerns about the process would be multiplied.

At his institution, Landry said, “I would say people do feel uncomfortable with how the process played out, even though they like the outcome.” He continued, “Maybe

the question of legitimacy is different in higher education than it was before.” Landry concluded that the way a president is onboarded might add to that legitimacy.

Thus, participants in this study described the way the presidential transition process may influence the success of a presidency. Participants reported that a good process can add to the legitimacy of the administration, leading to less turbulent presidencies. They also reported that some good presidencies might emerge from bad processes while bad presidencies may stem from good processes. Participants explained how a presidential transition process can not only help the new president develop relationships between stakeholders but also engage groups in the governance of colleges and universities.

Summary of Participants’ Involvement in the Onboarding Phase

Participants indicated that they were involved heavily in helping to develop relationships during this phase of the presidential transition process. They reported that they spent a great deal of time providing the newly selected president with information he or she needed to learn about the issues facing the institution and helping the new president develop relationships with all stakeholders. They also attempted to foster a sense of teamwork among the senior administrative team as they served in a new administration. The participants outlined the role of the previous president and how he or she could help or hinder efforts of the new president to navigate a new presidency. In addition, participants described the way academic tenure allowed senior academic leaders to speak more candidly during this phase of the transition process. Finally, participants discussed ways the entire presidential transition process might impact the success of a presidency.

Evidence of Decision-Making Present During the Three Phases of the Presidential Transition Process

Participants also described which decision-making frames were evident during the three phases of the presidential transition process. The frames identified were collegial, political, cultural, and bureaucratic. There was little evidence of the other models discussed: intuition, garbage can, or rational.

The collegial model was evident primarily in the reflection and onboarding phases. Casey and Landry provided examples of those collegial processes. Casey described leading institutional planning processes prior to the announcement of a presidential search. Casey engaged faculty in discussions about the future of the institution. The outcome of those meetings informed other campus work. Landry described the way senior staff spent time working together during the onboarding phase to discuss the type and amount of information the newly selected president needed to be successful. Participants were able to provide leadership by engaging numerous stakeholders, leading planning processes, and making decisions about which information a newly selected leader needed to develop relationships and meet pressing campus issues.

The bureaucratic decision-making frame was particularly evident in the selection phase when decision-makers used their authority to construct a selection committee and choose a new president. Reese and Mason described selection processes that were termed “closed.” The selection processes did not seek information from a wide range of stakeholders. As a result, the processes were described as “foreign” and “anxiety” producing. The decisions were made by those in the administrative hierarchy without

extensive input from the community and were therefore evidence of bureaucratic decision-making.

The political decision-making frame was evident when those involved in the decision-making process hoped to either limit the flow of information or influence a decision by advocating for a group or program. Parker stated that he was not a part of the formal selection process because of disagreements between key decision-makers during the presidential transition process. As a result, those in power attempted to influence the selection process by advocating the inclusion of those with similar views and the exclusion of those with views that might conflict. This is indicative of a political decision-making model. Pusser (2003) synthesized the literature about the frame and described it as one defined by concern about the “activities of institutional subgroups, internal interests, coalition building and bargaining” (p. 124). In this case, Parker was excluded because decision-makers had interests that differed from Parker’s perceived interests. Landry, Reese, Parker, and Rory provided evidence of political decision-making in stating that they had to become advocates for the inclusion of faculty members during the selection phase.

Decision-making influenced by institutional culture was evident when participants examined the way the decision-making processes at the various institutions were constructed. The cultural decision-making frame was evident when Eden described how a lack of formal policy left stakeholders without clear guidance, allowing them to rely on their “gut” when making a decision. Ryan also described how cultural characteristics of the institution affected the composition of the search committee. The presence of the decision-making frames are interpreted and analyzed in chapter 5.

Summary of Findings

The participants in this study stated that they were heavily involved in the first phase, or reflection period, of the presidential transition process. They were involved in this phase by leading and participating in institutional planning processes or by helping develop the presidential prospectus. Two participants discussed the way institutional policy may impact the presidential transition process.

Few of the senior academic leaders who participated reported being involved in the actual search committee during the selection phase of the presidential transition process. Many participants reported being involved during this phase by providing informal feedback and by participating in formal interviews of the candidates. Four participants in this study reported being a candidate for the presidency, which impacted their participation in this phase of the transition. Numerous participants discussed the concern about confidentiality and the way that concern altered the process of selection.

During the final phase of the presidential transition process, the senior academic leaders who participated in this study reported that their role during this phase was to help develop and facilitate the development of relationships. Participants also explained that former presidents could help or hinder the development of those relationships. Some participants identified how tenure could provide academic freedom for senior academic leaders to speak freely during this phase in ways that other administrative leaders (e.g., vice president for student affairs or vice president for institutional advancement) may not enjoy. Finally, senior academic leaders who participated in this study described the way a presidential transition process may impact the actual presidency of a newly selected leader.

The senior academic leaders who participated in this study had important roles in each of the three phases of the presidential transition process. Senior academic leaders exerted important leadership in each phase by representing the academic program to varying stakeholders. During the reflection phase, they led processes in institutional planning and policy development, synthesizing the views of the faculty about the needs and direction of the institution. In the selection phase, they displayed leadership when they provided formal and informal feedback to those selecting the new president and served as a representative of the academic program to formal decision-makers and potential candidates. In the onboarding phase, they demonstrated leadership by serving as a representative of the faculty to the newly selected president. The way in which organizational decision-making processes did or did not support the engagement of senior academic leaders is analyzed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5:

INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to describe, interpret, and analyze the way in which senior academic leaders were involved in the presidential transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities. A basic qualitative interpretive design was used to answer the following research and analytical questions: What was the role of senior academic leaders (i.e., provost or vice president for academic affairs) in the various phases of the presidential transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities? How did the senior academic leaders describe the decision-making process during the various phases of the presidential transition process?

Little empirical research exists on the presidential transition process in higher education (McLaughlin, 1996; Stanley & Betts, 2004). This study adds to the literature in three ways: (1) it provides additional empirical work about the presidential transition process in higher education, as it specifically analyzed and interpreted the experiences of one stakeholder group with the phases of the presidential transition process; (2) it adds to the body of literature, as it analyzed the views and experiences of one stakeholder group across multiple locations of study; and (3) it provides additional insight into the literature on organizational decision-making, as it applied decision-making models to a decision that may affect all facets of institutional life symbolically and substantively in higher education. In its examination of organizational reflection about institutional needs and goals, the engagement of stakeholders, and the development of relationships, this research also sheds light on how the tension between academic values and economic forces is evident during important institutional decision-making processes.

The first four chapters described the problem, reviewed existing literature on the topic, outlined the methodology used to conduct the research, and presented the findings. This chapter provides the researcher’s interpretation of the experiences of participants. Four key findings are presented and discussed. This chapter also includes nine recommendations to improve practice associated with all phases of the presidential transition process. Finally, suggestions for additional research are presented.

Summary of Themes

Ten themes were identified during this research (Table 5.1). Those themes answered the research question by describing the involvement of the participants in the three phases (reflection, selection, and onboarding) of the presidential transition process.

Table 5.1
Study Themes

Phase	Themes
Reflection	1. Senior academic leaders’ involvement in institutional planning processes during the reflection phase of the presidential transition process
	2. The potential impact of formal policy on the presidential transition process
Selection	3. Senior academic leaders’ participation on the presidential search committee
	4. Senior academic leaders’ informal input to formal decision-makers
	5. Senior academic leaders’ participation in formal interviews of presidential candidates
	6. The impact of confidentiality concerns on the presidential transition process
Onboarding	7. The role of senior academic leaders in facilitating relationship development
	8. The involvement of the immediate past president in the presidential transition process
	9. Senior academic leaders’ status as tenured faculty members and the corresponding ability to speak candidly about the transition process
	10. Impact of the presidential transition process on the success of the presidency

Senior academic leaders felt most comfortable when the collegial decision-making frame was used and least comfortable when other frames were used. The presence of some frames and the absence of others provided the framework to analyze the

involvement of the participants. Those interpretations are analyzed and discussed in the next section.

Findings

Four major findings emerged during the course of this research. The findings were developed after reviewing the 10 themes in the context of the literature reviewed about the presidential transition process and presidency in chapter 2. The first finding describes the decision-making frames present during the presidential transition processes experienced by the participants. The second finding details the decision-making frames not present during the experiences provided by the participants. The third finding analyzes why tension between academic and market values may be present as a result of the decision-making processes present during the presidential transition. The fourth and final finding outlines the way a presidential transition process can impact an institution regardless of the outcome. Together, the findings inform practice and scholarship about the presidential transition process at private, selective, nonprofit colleges and universities and organizational decision-making.

Finding 1: Four Decision-Making Frames Are Present in the Presidential Transition Process

This research found evidence of four decision-making frames: collegial, political, bureaucratic, and cultural, as shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2
Decision-Making Frames Present During the Transition Process

Frame	Phase	Participants
Collegial	Reflection	Casey, Reese, Cameron, Shelby, Morgan, Rory
	Onboarding	Landry, Elliot, Ryan
Political	Reflection	Carter, Parker
	Selection	Carter, Avery, Reese
	Onboarding	Parker, Harper
Bureaucratic	Selection	Landry, Casey, Avery, Blake, Harper
	Onboarding	Pat, Jamie
Cultural	Reflection	Eden
	Selection	Ryan
	Onboarding	Payton, Elliot, Avery

Collegial. The participants provided multiple examples of the presence of the collegial decision-making frame during two phases of the presidential transition process: the reflection and onboarding phases. Participants provided little evidence of the collegial decision-making frame in the selection phase of the presidential transition process.

During the reflection phase, participants Casey, Reese, and Cameron reported being involved in the process by leading institutional planning processes. Shelby and Morgan described being involved in the process during this phase when they helped develop the prospectus for the presidency. Those participants collected a wide range of opinions in hopes of developing consensus. Casey detailed leading planning of campus-wide processes that included a wide range of faculty members. Reese used the term “university perspective,” and Cameron used the term “we” twice and the term “our challenges” when describing the development of a planning document built by the faculty to be used to inform the presidential candidates and the campus strategic planning process. Shelby said that information “filtered up” from the community to inform the

final document produced after the community came to “consensus.” Morgan stated that “there was considerable effort to involve faculty” in the development of the prospectus and in the entire process.

Those descriptions provided by the five participants are consistent with a collegial decision-making environment. Chaffee (1983) described this decision-making model as one that values “shared responsibility” where “actors have an equal opportunity to contribute” and where “participants are willing to explain, defend, receive new information and ideas” (p. 17). Chaffee (1983) further indicated that this model is dedicated to the premise of “consensus” and that participants are “willing to compromise for the general welfare” of the organization (p. 17). In line with this description, the participants described processes committed to widespread involvement, the incorporation of multiple views, and shared responsibility.

Rory provided another example of collegial decision-making during the reflection phase of the presidential transition process. He described how the development of explicit policy was used to help connect presidential administrations. Rory stated that his institution was in the process of three major campus-planning processes and that the previous president left at the completion of the strategic planning process. Rory explained, “We had three projects [shared governance, strategic plan, and resource allocation] that were ongoing. . . . We made sure the next steps were clear so there were no questions about what the next steps were for the new president.” Rory added that the goal was to proactively describe and define the different roles of campus stakeholders in the governance process.

The example provided by Rory also described a collegial decision-making frame, which is characterized as “iterative” with feedback based on “participants’ observations and priorities” (Chaffee, 1983, p. 17). The solicitation of input from multiple stakeholders to discuss, codify, and communicate suggestions shows an iterative feedback loop that communicates the desires and wishes of stakeholders and decision-makers, which is consistent with a collegial frame of decision-making. The goal of that policy process was to capture and transfer the work of one administration for use in a new presidential administration.

Participants provided information they deemed to be worthy of the new president’s time and attention during the third and final phase of the transition process, onboarding. Participants described spending “hours” with the new president over the course of “months.” The information was provided in informal and formal meetings over a period of time, indicating an iterative process where information flowed in two directions, providing those who reported to a president the opportunity to influence decision-making while also having the opportunity to understand the president’s goals in making decisions. This is consistent with a collegial decision-making model, as described by Chaffee (1983), who stated that the model is “interactive and iterative” and “participants are willing to explain, defend, receive new information and ideas” (p. 17).

Landry’s experience provides another example of the way a collegial decision-making frame was present during the onboarding phase of the presidential transition process. Landry asked and received permission from a “gracious” sitting president to use meeting time with senior staff to plan and prepare together for the arrival of a new president. The willingness to allow senior staff to use important time to work on issues

of future importance rather than immediate concern is evidence of a collegial decision-making environment provided by the then-sitting president. The fact that senior administrators wanted to work together to develop information to link one administration to another is also evidence that the institution valued dialogue and consensus, hallmarks of a collegial decision-making framework, according to Chaffee, who described such a framework as one where participants “receive new information” and “take time to meet and discuss” (Chaffee, 1983, p. 17).

Political. Participants also described ways the political decision-making frame was present during the reflection, selection, and onboarding phases of the transition process. Carter stated he was not involved in the reflection and selection phases of the transition because of strained relationships between the previous president and faculty members, which did not reflect well on Carter or other senior administrators. This experience is consistent with a political decision-making model. Chafee (1983) described such a model as one defined by the building of coalitions, where those involved coalesce around “partisan” interests and where feedback is based on “relative changes in actor strength and organizational conditions” (p. 19). In this case, Carter was not a part of the committee because decision-makers were sensitive to the frustrations faculty members had with the administration.

Parker stated that he was not a part of the formal selection process because of disagreements between key decision-makers during the presidential transition process. As a result, those in power attempted to influence the selection process by advocating that those with similar views be a part of the formal selection process while excluding those with differing views. This is indicative of a political decision-making model.

Pusser (2003) synthesized the literature about the frame and described it as one defined by concern about the “activities of institutional subgroups, internal interests, coalition building and bargaining” (p. 124). In this case, Parker was excluded because decision-makers had interests that differed from Parker’s perceived interests. This experience is consistent with the findings of Birnbaum (2000), who argued that the decision to choose one system over another is a political, not technical decision. A person in a position of authority excluded Parker from the process because of a political decision that prioritized the interests of one group.

Two participants described the way they provided informal feedback to board members and other decision-makers during the selection phase of the presidential transition process. The participants who discussed providing informal feedback were involved in efforts to ensure the selection process was seen as fair and legitimate among faculty members, and in so doing, they ensured the president selected was seen as legitimate in order to protect the institution’s academic integrity. Participants stated that informal conversations focused on advocating that specific faculty members be involved on the search committee. Avery provided interpretations of the candidates directly to the board chairman; Reese also provided input to the board chairman about the way the mechanics of the search process might be improved. This lobbying was indicative of political decision-making, consistent with Chaffee’s description of a political decision-making environment characterized by an “expression of actors’ self-interest” (Chaffee, 1983, p. 19). Weingartner posited that political decision-making might stem from competition for scarce resources. In the situation described by Avery, the ability to serve on the formal search committee was limited. Reese may also have felt the need to speak

up because of the importance of the decision and process. In response, those senior academic leaders became advocates for improvements to the selection process that would increase the academic program's input.

Senior academic leaders were sought out to help further the goal of a decision-maker. The conversations did not follow an established bureaucratic authority established to make a decision; arise as a result of longstanding values, beliefs, and assumptions of a community; or arise as a result of thorough and inclusive conversations with the entire community. Decision-makers sought out the senior academic leaders to improve their understanding of an issue or to get advice on people or how to improve a process, thereby enhancing their ability to make better decisions, an inherently political event as the decision was prioritized above the transparency of the process. Had the conversations been part of a public process, the decision-making process may have been defined as collegial. Because other stakeholders did not know the conversations were taking place, stakeholders did not know that the decision-makers were soliciting the input of senior academic leaders. The lack of transparency may therefore limit the engagement of other stakeholders, as they may not have a formal understanding of what the decision-makers were soliciting or from whom they were soliciting input. Birnbaum (1988b) argued that participation in the presidential transition process is important because it serves as a symbol to the community about the issues and groups prioritized by those in authority. Decision-makers lose an opportunity to publicly demonstrate the academic program is prioritized when senior academic leaders are consulted in private rather than in public.

Parker and Harper stated that sitting presidents limited the flow of information in the onboarding process because they were unhappy that their preferred candidates were not chosen as successors. The two presidents “cut off information” to the new president and didn’t engage fully with the onboarding process, limiting the ability of the new president to access information about the community. Parker stated that the president at his institution acted in this way because the president was “obsessed with his legacy.” This is evidence of political decision-making. Chafee (1983) described such a model as “partisan,” where “actors have varying interests apart from any superordinate goal” (p. 19). In this case, the former presidents at these two institutions attempted to stem the flow of information and exclude individuals from the decision-making process in order to further their preferences or priorities as opposed to those agreed upon by stakeholders in the community.

Bureaucratic. Participants provided evidence of bureaucratic decision-making during the selection and onboarding processes. Landry stated that he had little input in developing the prospectus or during the search process as part of the selection phase. Landry posited that the search process was closed because of concerns about confidentiality. The decision-makers in this case valued the decision itself over the process. Those decision-makers wanted the decision to be made quickly and without difficulty. Engaging numerous stakeholders in the process is more time and labor intensive. Valuing the decision over the process is consistent with a bureaucratic decision-making model, which according to Chaffee (1983) values “operational efficiency” and initially identifies the “output of the procedure” (p. 22).

Casey, Avery, and Blake indicated that they were not part of the formal selection team because of concerns about the possibility of selecting an immediate supervisor. Those concerns are indicative of a bureaucratic decision-making process that values “formal, hierarchical administrative structures” (Pusser, 2003, p. 123).

As part of a traditional search and selection process, numerous members of a campus were provided time to meet with the finalists. These interviews or conversations allowed all involved to feel a sense of engagement with the process and provided a way for the decision-makers to receive feedback and vet the candidates. Senior academic leaders were in a position to provide a great deal of substantive input while adding legitimacy because of their symbolic position in the administrative hierarchy. A number of senior academic leaders reported conducting interviews with the candidates or consultants to the presidential search.

The inclusion of senior academic leaders on teams that conducted interviews with potential candidates and/or consultants is characteristic of a bureaucratic decision-making framework. The participants who were part of the formal interview process were proud they were involved in this way. Blake stated that he was “one of the few” who was involved, while Harper referred to this involvement as a “privilege.” These descriptions provide examples of the way involvement in the search process was an honor bestowed on only a handful of selected individuals. Because of the senior academic leaders’ title and subsequent authority, they were included in the interview process. The decision to include senior academic leaders in that process is indicative of a bureaucratic decision-making framework, as those in positions of authority are granted the ability to make decisions on behalf of others. Pusser (2003) described bureaucratic decision-making as

likely to have “hierarchical administrative structures” and a “well-defined division of labor” (p. 123). The inclusion of senior academic leaders in the formal interview process was predictable and displayed a level of respect for the academic program and senior academic leaders.

Pat and Jamie described two instances when a newly selected president’s previous experiences with the institution did not lead to the smooth transition and understanding of the issues facing the institution that were expected. Pat stated that the new president was selected in part to keep up the institution’s “positive momentum” and to keep the institution running “like normal.” Pat stated that that “opposite” happened despite the president’s deep ties to the institution. It is important to note that Pat described this president’s transition as exceptionally fast and confidential. Jamie offered that the new president at her institution took the onboarding process for granted and, as a result, “I don’t think there was much of a transition process at all.” Jamie continued, “I think he would have helped the community if he would have spent more time listening and less time talking.” The willingness to exert decision-making authority because of a position in the administrative hierarchy is indicative of a bureaucratic decision-making process. In these two cases, decisions were made by those at the top of an “organization’s structure,” and a “limited repertoire” of alternatives may have been presented because of the limited number of stakeholders who were able to participate in the actual decision (Chaffee, 1983, p. 22).

Cultural. Participants provided evidence of cultural decision-making in all three phases of the transition process. Eden stated that her institution had no policy guiding the presidential transition process. She offered, “There was never a discussion about what

those procedures could or should be, . . . no [discussion] about how we refine those [processes] as we find out more.” Eden described the decision-making model as cultural and continued, “It [decision-making] was in everybody’s gut. . . . It was received wisdom.” This description is consistent with a decision-making model influenced by culture, as outlined by Tierney. He wrote that when using a cultural perspective to understand decision-making, “we have a better understanding of how seemingly unconnected acts and events fall into place” (Tierney, 2008, p. 6). In the situation described by Eden, those involved in the decision were connected by their understanding of the institution and its values, beliefs, and assumptions rather than formal policy or hierarchy.

Ryan explained that she was not a part of the formal selection process at her institution, which had a religious affiliation. Ryan described an institutional desire to select a president with a specific type of religious background, consistent with the prospectus developed for the search and the institution’s widely shared values and beliefs. As a result, these concerns took precedence over the inclusion of any single stakeholder or group on the selection committee. This decision-making environment may therefore be characterized as cultural. Pusser (2003) stated that a cultural frame is characterized by a “shared network of norms, beliefs, meanings and understandings” that shape “organizational structures and processes” (p. 124). In this case, the religious history of the institution provided the cultural “norms and beliefs” that tied members of the community together and informed decision-making. This experience is consistent with the findings of Kezar and Eckel (2002), who argued that when institutions experience change, leaders may consider using “culturally appropriate strategies”

(p. 437). The leaders of this transition process conducted a presidential transition process that was sensitive to the organizational culture, and as a result stakeholders found the process and outcome legitimate.

Payton and Elliott described the way new presidents' personal and professional experiences helped them get accustomed to the environment quickly. This is consistent with the work of Cohen and March (1974) who wrote, "The result of the selection process is the selection of presidents who are likely, in so far as one can judge from social backgrounds, to be acceptable to the main internal and external groups concerned with the college" (p. 24). They continued, "Socialization produces an expectation that presidents will share the values of their subordinates and the members of important subgroups inside the college" (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 25). These examples provide an example of decision-making influenced by culture. Tierney (2008) wrote, "Understanding of how seemingly unconnected acts and events fall into place" provides an academic leader an understanding of stakeholder group interpretations (p. 6). In the cases described by these participants, the presidents' personal and professional background provided the opportunity to understand the way stakeholders interpreted various issues. That understanding may improve communication and ultimately the ability to develop relationships, which McLaughlin (1996) indicated is a critically important purpose of the presidential transition process.

Avery described the previous president's outlook as "gloomy," which led to an environment in which "dark clouds" were present on campus. This outlook created an atmosphere that led to the search for a president who would be more "upbeat and positive." This description provides an example of the way in which an academic

president's symbolic leadership affected the campus atmosphere as well as the decisions of others. In this case, the sitting president's "gloomy" outlook impacted the campus atmosphere to the point the institution collectively responded that the next president should have a different outlook. The president affected the atmosphere of the institution to the degree that it impacted the preferred characteristics desired in a new president. This is evidence of decision-making impacted by cultural assumptions. Tierney (2008) stated that using a cultural framework allows a leader to "understand the symbolic dimensions of ostensibly instrumental decisions and actions" (p. 27). In this case, the long-serving previous president may not have realized that his words, mood, and demeanor influenced the atmosphere on campus to such a degree.

Because of the complexity of the role of president (Kerr & Gade, 1986), the varying interpretations of organizational mission and purpose (Trachtenberg et al., 2013), and the numerous legitimate goals a college or university may prioritize (Julius et al., 1999), it is understandable that certain decision-making frames are present during the transition process. Decision-making processes that sought and mediated input between numerous stakeholders like the collegial and political frames and that understood the symbolic and substantive importance of the presidency like the cultural and bureaucratic frames were likely to be present. Those four frames—collegial, political, bureaucratic, and cultural—were present in this research.

Finding 2: Three Frames Are Not Present in the Presidential Transition Process

The research found little evidence that three decision-making frames were present during the presidential transition processes experienced by the participants. The three decision-making frames not present were garbage can, intuition, and rationality.

The garbage can frame is described as one where “problems and solutions are attached to choices, and thus to each other, not because of any means-ends linkage but because of their temporal proximity” (March, 1994, p. 200). Cohen et al. (1972) argued that the mix in the can is dependent on the type of cans available and the way we label them (the problems identified), the type of garbage produced, and the speed the garbage is collected and removed (solutions available in the time we are provided). The authors made the case that problems and solutions are separate. Actors prioritize a problem or a solution based on their personal wants or desires. Actors attach a preferred problem or solution to the situation to further their agenda, regardless of the situation. The final decision is limited to the problems or solutions prioritized by the actors rather than the problems or solutions that might be conceived by a different group of actors.

It is not surprising that little evidence of this decision-making frame was found in the research. In even the most closely held of searches described by the participants, large numbers of people and stakeholders provided input. It is unlikely that one person would have the authority or ability to control a decision during a transition process to such a degree that his or her prioritized solution would be accepted and seen as legitimate. A decision to select a new president affects many stakeholders, and any selection would have to be seen as legitimate to multiple actors and stakeholders. It was, therefore, unlikely, that this decision-making frame would be present during a presidential transition process.

It is also unsurprising that the intuition frame was not present during the research. March and Simon (1993) described intuition and associated decision-making as the “rapid response . . . and inability of the respondent to report a sequence of steps leading

to the result” (p. 11). The authors went on to write that decision-makers make decisions “without explicit conscious calculation,” and the ability to make good decisions not by analysis alone comes from the development of intuition or “rules of action acquired through years of training and experience” (March & Simon, 1993, p. 12). Presidential transition processes should be designed to provide the newly selected presidents with a sense of legitimacy (AGB, 2006). The establishment of formal procedures that describe how a selection process is to be handled helps add to that legitimacy. That formality provides stakeholders with confidence that the president was selected as a result of widespread input and thoughtful deliberation. The formality and deliberate nature of presidential transition processes stand in stark contrast to the intuition frame. Therefore, it is logical that little evidence of that frame was found in the research.

Finally, the study found little evidence of the rationality frame. March and Simon (1993) described a framework for rational decision-making as one that provides decision-makers with reasons that inform both their choices and “justifications for those choices” (p. 7). A decision-maker, in practice, may identify and prioritize certain goals of a selection process. The decision-maker may assign numerical values to those priorities. Once a decision is made, the decision-maker can communicate to stakeholders that the candidate selected scored higher than any of the other candidates considered.

It is understandable that this frame was not present in the research. Presidential transition processes, like other major institutional decisions in higher education, are subjective, according to Birnbaum. Birnbaum (2000) argued that the decision to choose one governance system over another is a political rather than a technical decision. Therefore, the process of assigning specific values to the priorities identified is

subjective. A stakeholder may prioritize one criterion over another because that criterion may be more likely to produce a candidate with a skill set desirable to the stakeholder. This example shows the way that the presidential selection process is subjective, which is consistent with the findings of Trachtenberg et al. (2013), who argued that a college or university has a number of legitimate missions, purposes, and outcomes, leading to varying interpretations of organizational mission and effectiveness and making evaluation difficult. Because the institutions have numerous legitimate and differing purposes, it is understandable that leadership selection processes used subjective decision-making frames rather than a rational frame.

The garbage can, intuition, and rationality frames were not used because of the nature of the decisions associated with the presidential transition process and the role of a president. The goal of the process was to identify a leader who could bring various stakeholder groups together to move the institution forward (AGB, 2006). Processes that did not take an extensive amount of time to reflect on the needs of the institution or did not value the numerous legitimate views of stakeholders, like the garbage can, intuition, and rationality frames, were unlikely to be used.

Finding 3: Tension Between Market and Academic Values Is Present During the Presidential Transition Process

There is noted tension between academic values and economic realities, as pointed out by Gumport (2000), Kezar (2004), and Labaree (1997). This study collected and interpreted the experiences of senior academic leaders during a major institutional decision. Participants identified tension between administrative and academic priorities at all phases of the presidential transition process. One participant, Eden, stated, “There

is always a tension . . . that frames the practice of shared governance. The ability to maintain the university relies on the ability to share governance with faculty. If you alienate that, you will drive away strong faculty. That is obviously the road to hell.”

That tension was evident when analyzing the various types of decision-making processes present during the presidential transition process. Participants described collegial, political, bureaucratic, and cultural decision-making frameworks. The participants did not describe decision-making frameworks consistent with the garbage can, rational, or intuition models. Participants were most involved and most comfortable when decision-makers used collegial decision-making processes as opposed to other models. This may be the case because the collegial model is most commonly used in academia. Chaffee (1983) wrote, “It has been traditionally assumed that colleges and universities make most of their decisions according to a model named for them: the collegial model” (p. 15). Chaffee (1983) continued, “The consensus among today’s higher education managers is that while the collegial model may apply to academic decisions, it does not describe the nonacademic decisions that cause the greatest problems for administrators” (p. 16). The decisions surrounding the presidential transition process affect both the administrative and academic components of a college or university. The use of decision-making frameworks that differ from what is typical in the academic program may cause angst among faculty members and create a source of tension. Faculty members may be fearful that administrative concerns driven by market values have overtaken academic concerns.

Participants reported that numerous small decisions made during the transition process could lead to the way stakeholders are included in the decision-making process,

the way information is collected from the community, and the way decisions are communicated back to the college or university community. Each of those decisions is an opportunity to engage stakeholders in a large and important institutional decision. The inclusion of stakeholders in the process may help decrease the tension between academic and administrative components.

The use or presence of decision-making processes other than a collegial decision-making process during the reflection phase of the presidential transition process violated the expectations from the AGB about strong presidential transition processes. When the participants were involved deeply in a process or leading that process, the decision-making environment was assessed to be collegial. When senior academic leaders were not involved, the framework was assessed to be bureaucratic, political, or cultural. The AGB (2006) wrote, “The board must have a clear understanding of the institution, the challenges it faces, and the leadership qualities required of the next president at this point in the institution’s history” (p. 15). A governing board may get access to that information during this phase of a presidential transition process by appointing a search committee that consists of “trustees, faculty members and other stakeholders” (AGB, 2006, p. 15). The committee “must be reflective . . . of the different parts of the institution” (AGB, 2006, p. 16). Each committee member “must adopt a perspective that seeks to advance the institution as a whole, rather than harboring a constituency agenda concerned only with advancing a specific school or unit” (AGB, 2006, p. 16). The AGB provided a clear preference for the use of decision-making frameworks that are consistent with the collegial model based on this recommendation.

The decision to make a presidential search process closed to protect candidates and broaden the candidate pool or open to increase engagement and facilitate the development of relationships is left to those who are leading the search effort. Those with the authority to build the process are in a position to decide for the institution which process the college or university needs at that particular time. By deciding the degree to which the selection process is informed by public input from stakeholders, those who run a presidential selection process become the ultimate jurors about institutional priorities. Birnbaum (1988b) posited that the most important outcome of a presidential search and selection process was not simply the decision to select a new president but the decision to engage certain stakeholders. The inclusion of those stakeholders is a sign of the relative importance of that stakeholder group and the work of that group (Birnbaum, 1988b). The AGB (2006) concurred and stated, “The validity of the process used to select the president is enormously important” because the selection of a president “must be reached in a way that gains broad affirmation within the academic community” (p. 17).

Dozens of legitimate priorities may be identified during the reflection phase of the presidential transition process. Those on the presidential search committee are in a position to decide which skill sets a new president must possess in order to match specific priorities determined by stakeholders during the reflection period. Therefore, the decision to conduct a closed search may be viewed by stakeholders as one that indicates the board and search firm fully understand the needs of the community and that sufficient safeguards are in place to properly vet candidates. This is consistent with the AGB’s expectations that the “board is proceeding from a thorough understanding of the

institution's needs, now and over the course of the next decade" during a presidential transition process (AGB, 2006, p. 33).

A decision to conduct an open selection process may be seen by stakeholders as indicating that the board and search committee value input about the needs of the institution and welcome help vetting candidates. As such, the decision to conduct a closed or transparent presidential selection process is indicative of bureaucratic decision-making, as the process values "the centrality of credentials and expertise" and "focus[es] on merit as a source of organizational legitimacy," according to Pusser (2003, p. 123), who synthesized the literature on the decision-making frame. In this case, the board is responsible for making a very important decision about the nature of the presidential transition process. The members of the board are in a position to determine which "credentials" and "expertise" are needed to conduct a presidential transition process that is seen as legitimate by stakeholders.

Three participants in this study described the way in which earned academic tenure may allow a senior academic leader the opportunity to provide honest feedback without the fear of losing employment at an institution. Pusser and Turner (2004) argued that tenure is a mechanism that provides academics with the responsibility for "knowledge generation and knowledge dissemination" (p. 250). Senior academic leaders noted that tenure was a benefit they could earn while other administrators, like the chief financial officer or the chief advancement officer, could not. Reese and Avery stated that their tenure was helpful in allowing them to speak freely, while Mason stated that the lack of tenure would mean he may have to work elsewhere if the new president was not pleased with his work or plan for the academic program.

The rewarding of tenure provides those in academia with the ability to conduct research on topics that may be controversial or unpopular but may ultimately further the body of knowledge. Pusser and Turner (2004) stated, “For academic freedom to have meaning, faculty must have the latitude to exercise judgment and intellectual creativity” (p. 251). They added that freedom influences the “choice of research questions and the organization of curricula” (Pusser & Turner, 2004, p. 251). The freedom provided by tenure may, therefore, lessen the power differential between the senior academic leadership and the newly selected president and provide an important voice for the academic program. These experiences are consistent with the views of Butler (2009), who argued that the notion of academic freedom is crucial to protecting the ability of professors to conduct critical inquiry.

Finding 4: The Presidential Transition Process Has the Ability to Affect a Presidency

Participants in this study reported that the presidential transition process has the ability to impact the presidency of the person selected. A search and selection process that includes many stakeholders may help a newly selected president develop relationships with those in the community. A reflection process that seeks out and values the input of stakeholders may add to the legitimacy of the administration, as the work of the president may be aligned with the prioritized concerns of stakeholders. As a result, stakeholders may feel more engaged with a new administration if they feel their voices were heard during such an important institutional process. Participants also reported that some good presidencies might emerge from bad processes while bad presidencies may emerge from good processes. However, Eden offered that a campus takes a “risk” when

conducting a presidential transition process that does not seek out and value input from stakeholders. That risk may become manifest as the newly selected president demonstrates a “failure to connect with on-campus constituencies.”

Shelby and Pat described their experiences with searches as open and closed. Both came to a similar conclusion: the way the presidential search process was conducted impacted the initial stages of a presidency. Shelby stated that the “transparent” process provided the president a “firm foundation,” while Pat stated that had the board handled the closed search processes differently, “I think the transition would have been easier for the campus and the first year would have been better.” Morgan concurred and described the two separate presidential searches his institution conducted before selecting a candidate. The first search was open, which offered the opportunity for the community to provide input and for the board to “listen.” While the first search was unsuccessful, it did inform the next search process, which was successful. Morgan stated that if the campus did not have the opportunity to provide that input, the selected president might not have received the same level of support. Morgan stated, “I think the campus needed to have the opportunity for, no matter how good [the candidate], there had to be a sense that they were part of the process.”

Participants consistently asserted that processes that seek and value the input of many stakeholders connected the stakeholders to the process, ultimately adding legitimacy to the decision. Two other participants connected the legitimacy of the selection process to the ability of the newly selected president to earn the support of the community. Landry commented, “The [newly selected] president has to win over the faculty one way or another, and this sort of a process [closed] puts a president at a

disadvantage.” Reese concurred, stating that if you don’t “have integrity in the process, the selectee could lose some legitimacy.” A process that did not seek input from stakeholders asked those in the community to put an extreme amount of trust in the decision-makers. If decision-makers substituted or valued their personal views above those of the stakeholders, it could increase the power differential between those who have the authority to make a decision and those who do not. This may serve as a source of tension. March and Simon (1993) argued, “Decreases in power visibility increase the legitimacy of the supervisory position and therefore decrease the tension within the group” (p. 62). As a result, the degree to which stakeholders may be involved in the decision-making processes associated with the presidential transition process may serve to increase or decrease tension between decision-makers and other campus stakeholders.

Landry expanded on the way a presidential transition process might influence a presidency. He stated, “Process isn’t everything, but it is an interesting element that you are discovering. If the outcome wasn’t right, the concerns about the process would be multiplied.” If a search was not inclusive or transparent, that did not automatically mean that the result of the selection process would be an unsuccessful presidency. Likewise, a search that was inclusive and transparent would not necessarily lead to a successful presidency. What we can infer from Landry’s experience is that “the president has to win over the faculty one way or another, and this sort of a process [closed] puts a president at a disadvantage.” A president selected from such a process had to spend additional time and effort that could be spent in other places “winning over faculty” and other stakeholders.

A closed process may also put additional pressure on the board and the search committee to make a positive selection or risk losing credibility in the eyes of stakeholders. The AGB (2006) indicated that a governing board can “contribute to the success of a presidency” by recognizing its responsibilities “to diverse constituencies” (p. 36). The AGB (2006) stated, “Governing boards must recognize that they are accountable to the institution’s diverse stakeholders. They need to develop formal and informal ways of facilitating interaction with these constituencies which include faculty, students, alumni, and the local community, among others” (p. 36). Governing boards must realize they have a responsibility to all stakeholders. By seeking out and valuing the input from those stakeholders during a presidential transition process, a governing board can increase the legitimacy of the presidential selection.

Conclusion of Findings

This research found evidence of four decision-making frames: collegial, bureaucratic, political, and cultural. The research found little evidence of the garbage-can, intuition, and rationality frames. The presence of decision-making frames during the transition process is consistent with the nature of the role of a college or university president and the goals of a presidential transition process. The evaluation of senior academic leaders’ involvement in the presidential transition process using decision-making frames provided evidence of tension between academic and market values. The research also identified the way a presidential transition process can impact the success of a presidency. The next section discusses implications for using the various decision-making frames during a presidential transition process.

Discussion of Findings

A college or university president is charged with tying stakeholders together to move the institution forward; as a result, presidential transition processes should be designed to facilitate those relationships. The AGB (2006) argued, “The president has primary responsibility for increasing public understanding and support for the institution” (p. vi). Because the president is the substantive and symbolic leader of the institution, he or she is expected to be the representative of all stakeholder groups and must tie those divergent views together in order to move the school forward and out of that “awkward intersection” of expectations, interpretations, and realities, as Labaree (1997, p. 41) described. The president must work with all stakeholder groups, understand the various concerns, and develop a unified plan of action. McLaughlin (1996) added that the president is a representative of the institution like no other and therefore is the singular figure in the organizational hierarchy to tie the various stakeholder groups together. A collegial model is therefore the best model to use during the presidential transition process because it gathers input from stakeholders and facilitates the development of important relationships between decision-makers and stakeholders.

A collegial model seeks the input of various stakeholders and builds consensus. Once in office, the newly selected president must bring various groups together to move the institution in a common direction. A decision-making model that seeks input from a wide range of stakeholders provides a newly selected president with information he or she needs to govern effectively and engage stakeholders. Cohen and March (1974) argued that an important goal of the presidential selection process is “the selection of presidents who are likely, in so far as one can judge from social backgrounds, to be

acceptable to the main internal and external groups concerned with the college” (p. 24). That “socialization produces an expectation that presidents will share the values of their subordinates and the members of important subgroups inside the college. . . . Disagreement with students or faculty is not only a political event for many presidents, it is also a problem of identity—and a surprise” (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 25). A collegial presidential transition process is helpful in developing relationships and transferring information between stakeholders and decision-makers, because it can help presidents become socialized at their new institutions. That socialization may help those presidents become less “surprised” at debates that occur between campus groups, as Cohen and March (1974) argued.

The collegial frame should guide decision-making during these processes because it is consistent with many major decision-making processes at colleges and universities (Chaffee, 1983). Kezar and Eckel (2002) argued that leaders of institutions should use culturally appropriate strategies when attempting to implement change. Using a collegial frame, the decision-making frame viewed as culturally appropriate by those working in academia, would therefore help the institution support the new president and achieve stated goals.

Academic freedom is a fundamental value of the academic enterprise. Academic freedom is essential to higher education, as it allows researchers to disseminate their results and others to have confidence in that research so it can be built upon. Butler (2009) argued that the notion of academic freedom is crucial to protecting the ability of those in the academy to conduct critical inquiry. In order to protect that freedom, those conducting research must have the ability to debate and criticize ideas. The operation of

critique, according to Butler (2009), is necessary to “supply norms” about “legitimate and illegitimate authority” (p. 775). Critique fosters legitimacy, as debates that take place in a transparent way help build consensus, allowing new knowledge to be created.

Legitimacy, in this fundamental aspect of higher education, is based on concepts of transparency, debate, and consensus. Those concepts are also fundamental characteristics of the collegial decision-making frame. Faculty members spend their careers operating in an environment that provides freedom to critique ideas to foster legitimacy. As the president is the symbolic and substantive leader of the entire institution, including the academic program, it is not surprising faculty would choose to debate the selection of a new president using the same constructs in which they work.

Working in any other decision-making framework may prevent information and research from being shared freely. Stakeholders may be skeptical of a decision-making process at an institution if some decisions are critiqued while others are not. The use of decision-making frameworks that differ from what is typical in the academic program may cause angst amongst faculty members and create a source of tension. Working in a decision-making framework that does not allow input from stakeholders so assertions can be critiqued may be considered illegitimate. Those who do not have the opportunity to participate in the process have no way of identifying and then providing support for “the legitimating grounds” of the decision being made by the decision-makers (Butler, 2009, p. 775). If stakeholders understand or participate in the process, they can defend the decision to any who question it. In the eyes of academic researchers, the ability to critique an idea or decision leads to additional support for the decision. The use of a

collegial decision-making frame may therefore increase support from faculty for decisions associated with the presidential transition process.

The collegial decision-making frame should be used to the greatest extent possible during the presidential transition process. The frame should be used because it facilitates the flow of information between decision-makers and stakeholders, helps socialize the newly selected president, and leads to a better chance of success because it is culturally appropriate. The next section of this chapter describes specific recommendations that encourage involvement from stakeholders.

Recommendations for Practice

Analysis of this research led to nine actionable recommendations intended for practitioners who lead presidential transition processes. The recommendations inform practice during each phase of the presidential transition process—reflection, selection, and onboarding—and focus on ways to facilitate the sharing of information between stakeholders and decision-makers; the role of senior academic leaders, sitting presidents, and board members; and ways institutions can protect the anonymity of candidates while capturing input from stakeholders.

Recommendation 1: The Reflection Phase Is an Opportunity to Solicit Extensive Input from Stakeholders

Those managing presidential search processes should ensure their institution undertakes a thorough and complete reflection process that fully evaluates and defines the college or university's goals, its current posture to meet those goals, and the associated skill set a president needs to effectively lead the college or university. This process

should be as open and transparent as possible, providing many in the community multiple opportunities to provide input. Numerous stakeholders should also have the opportunity to help develop the presidential prospectus to the degree that it is appropriate and logistically possible. The stakeholders may provide input about the prospectus during open forums or electronically. A draft prospectus may be developed and sent out to the community for input. Once information is collected and interpreted by the search firm and its consultants, the information should be provided back to the community to communicate the consensus interpreted by the search committee.

The committee should also ensure the transition process has enough time built in so that those from all aspects of institutional life are provided an opportunity to provide constructive input and that those comments are fully evaluated, appropriately acted upon, and communicated to the wider community. Adding transparency to this phase of the process helps the community develop consensus about institutional needs and goals, making it easier for the new leader to develop support for action once in office.

Such transparency also helps develop a system to hold decision-makers accountable during the selection phase. For example, if a college or university community develops a clear consensus that the institution needs a president to have a mixture of five specific qualities and experiences as described in the prospectus in order to symbolically and substantively meet the stated goals outlined in the strategic plan, the board should then value those conversations enough to consider selecting a president who has the skill set and experiences desired by the community. Stakeholders are given an opportunity to influence the framework of the transition, if not the actual selection process. That accountability may facilitate a stronger relationship between the board and

other stakeholders. If the input of stakeholders is valued and respected during this phase of the transition process, stakeholders may develop trust that the board will respect their views and experiences during other decision-making processes, increasing support for those decisions and adding legitimacy to the decision to select the president. The newly selected president may then enjoy additional support from the community, helping develop a shared sense of purpose among stakeholders and moving initiatives forward.

Recommendation 2: Institutions Should Evaluate Campus Policy when Conducting a Presidential Transition Process

Colleges and universities should evaluate established institutional policy describing how presidential transition processes should occur during the reflection phase of the transition. The results of the evaluation would inform decision-makers and the community about the need for formal policy to be developed before the search phase began. This formal policy process would encourage the institution to make and communicate decisions about stakeholder involvement, the timing of the process, and communication strategies. The development of formal policy is important, according to March and Simon (1993), because formal rules “increase the defensibility of individual action” (p. 58). If formal policy was developed, decision-makers could use that policy to garner support for a decision once it was made. In that way, policy may increase the legitimacy of the decision in the eyes of stakeholders.

Rory described his institution’s use of the policy process to formalize discussions and ensure work started by the community in one presidential administration would inform the next administration. Other institutions may consider codifying work of stakeholders by developing formal policy during the reflection phase of the presidential

transition process. The development of formal policy is a way to memorialize the efforts of all those involved so that future decisions are informed. Formal policy is developed as the result of a prescribed process that requires the involvement of certain stakeholders, specified communication of results, and approval of the work by administrators at a particular level. Because policy is developed as a result of those formal procedures, it should carry more weight with stakeholders than would a public utterance or email. Because of those procedures, policy should be more difficult to change and is designed to last beyond one administration. These conclusions are consistent with Stone's (2012) view of the policy process: "Rules derive most of their power from legitimacy, the quality of being perceived as good and right by those whose behavior they are meant to control" (p. 291). Policy can help add legitimacy to a decision.

Recommendation 3: Senior Academic Leaders Should Have the Opportunity to Formally Shape the Presidential Selection Process

Search committees should make efforts to solicit input from senior academic leaders about issues associated with the search committee in order to ensure the academic community views the process as legitimate. The AGB (2006) described a strong presidential selection process as one that "gains broad affirmation within the academic community" (p. 17). The search committee should seek input from senior academic leaders about decisions that may impact the academic program. As Blake, Casey, and Avery offered, there may be legitimate concerns about having senior academic leaders, or other senior administrative officers who are direct reports to a president, serve on the formal search committee. All those designing and implementing these transition processes, and specifically the formal search committee, should ensure that senior

academic leaders have the opportunity to offer input about the faculty members selected to serve on the formal search committee.

That input would provide senior academic leaders the opportunity to decide how various academic disciplines are represented. It may also provide senior academic leaders with the opportunity to reward certain faculty members with membership on the committee and to influence the process by selecting faculty with views that mirror their own. If the decision-making framework that characterizes the appointment of individuals to a search committee is political, offering the leadership of the academic program the ability to suggest or name faculty to the search committee may provide the academic program the opportunity to be part of negotiations that lead to culmination of a major institutional decision. That input from faculty leadership may provide the search with additional legitimacy in the view of faculty members. Landry described the way the inclusion of faculty members may add legitimacy to the search process. Landry stated the faculty on the search committee “played an extremely important role in introducing the person by credentials.” In that case, because faculty were involved in the selection process, the participants understood how the decision was made and could effectively communicate that process to other faculty, helping legitimize the process and decision.

Allowing senior academic leadership the opportunity to provide input about which faculty members participate may increase the legitimacy of the process as it facilitates the representation of faculty interests and communication between decision-makers and faculty members. This may help the search process meet the AGB (2006) mandate, which states that a presidential selection process should be developed in such a way that it is “widely regarded as fair and legitimate” (p. viii).

Senior academic leaders who participated in this study were pleased to provide input formally or informally to decision-makers during the selection phase of the presidential transition process. Participants reported being sought out by board members to provide their opinion about presidential candidates. Senior academic leaders were also asked for input about faculty members' involvement in the formal search process and about ways to improve the mechanics of the process itself. The decision-making framework associated with this informal input is characterized as political, which Chaffee (1983) described as "an expression of an actor's self interest" and "partisan" (p. 19). These discussions are characterized as political because those in a position of authority were attempting to further their understanding of an issue in order to further their self-interest and position in the search process.

The concern with the conversations as described by the participants in this study is that they happened in private. Chaffee (1983) argued that one downside to political decision-making is "that the result of the struggle cannot be predicted and results cannot be causally linked to objectives" (p. 20). The members of the faculty and larger community were not aware of the way senior academic leaders were influencing this phase of the presidential transition process. Because those discussions happened in private, the decision-makers during this phase lost the opportunity to explain why decisions were made. As a result, the decision-makers did not have the opportunity to garner support for the decision from those stakeholders. Stakeholders did not have the opportunity to learn about the overarching goals of the decision-makers and therefore did not have the ability to support the decision as fully as they could. Had the stakeholders been engaged in a decision and learned about the goals and desired outcomes of

stakeholders, they may have been more likely to support the decision because they understood the process that led to the decision. That additional buy-in from stakeholders would add to the legitimacy of the decision, as more stakeholders would support the decision because they understood it. The nature of these conversations may not add to the legitimacy of the decision in the eyes of stakeholders.

By offering the senior academic leaders a public opportunity to evaluate, discuss, and influence this phase of the presidential transition process, decision-makers could increase the legitimacy of the decision. By seeking out the views of those senior academic leaders during this phase in a systematic way, decision-makers could ensure that all decisions were vetted by this important position. As an example, senior academic leaders may be especially concerned about the way a new president would attempt to influence the academic program. A senior academic leader would be in an especially strong position to evaluate the way a new president would influence academic issues like interdisciplinary research, the hiring of new faculty across programs, and decisions about tenure. This organized, systematic vetting stands in contrast to the solicitation of input in an ad hoc manner. Soliciting this input also increases legitimacy because those people who report to the senior academic leader may become more engaged in the decision. As they are likely to have a closer professional relationship to their ultimate supervisor, the senior academic leader, than they might to another senior campus leader involved in the decision-making process, line faculty members may be more likely to feel able to influence or support a decision if their leadership is publicly involved. When decision-makers seek the input of stakeholders, they fulfill the AGB's expectation that presidential selection processes are seen as legitimate. The AGB (2006) stated, "The institutional

community must perceive that the presidential search and selection process has rigorously defined the challenges of the institution and resolutely sought the expressed qualities of leadership” (p. 34).

Recommendation 4: Senior Academic Leaders Should Participate in Formal Interviews of Candidates

Senior academic leaders should be involved with formal interviews of candidates during the selection phase of the presidential transition process. Senior academic leaders symbolically and substantively represent a major institutional stakeholder group, the faculty. As such, their inclusion in that formal interview process may add legitimacy to the process from the perspective of faculty members. Faculty may view senior academic leaders as their representatives in a presidential search process. Faculty may feel as if their interests and concerns are being heard and acted upon if their representatives are involved in formal interviews where they have a chance to ask questions and evaluate responses and priorities of a candidate using a framework that captures faculty concerns and desires. Senior academic leaders’ involvement in these formal interviews may also help the search committee vet candidates.

Because senior academic leaders have a set of professional experiences that differs from that of other senior institutional leaders (e.g., vice president of institutional advancement or vice president of student affairs), the senior academic leader may then evaluate candidates based on experiences or priorities other campus leaders may not be in a position to evaluate as fully. Senior academic leaders may be especially concerned about issues involving faculty tenure, faculty hiring, research priorities, or budget allocation across disciplines. By providing senior academic leaders with the ability to

formally interview the candidates, the issues the senior academic leader is responsible for are prioritized, ensuring the academic mission of the institution is valued and prioritized.

Recommendation 5: Leaders of the Transition Process Should Communicate Decisions Made During the Selection Process to Stakeholders

At the very beginning of the formal search process, the leaders of the search committee should describe to the entire community whether the presidential search process will be conducted in the open to facilitate relationships and develop engagement among stakeholders or whether it will be conducted in a confidential manner to strengthen the candidate pool. Describing why the decision was made may build confidence in the decision, as stakeholders will be able to assess the decision after it was made based on the goals described at the beginning of the process. By describing the rationale and goals for the decision, stakeholders will also understand how their work in the processes associated with the reflection phase (i.e., strategic planning) informs organizational decision-making. For example, if multiple stakeholder groups describe the way shared governance needs to be strengthened at a college or university, conducting a closed search may indicate that other institutional priorities identified during the reflection phase took precedence. The communication about the full context of a decision to make the search confidential or transparent may therefore help add legitimacy to the decision and help connect the work of all stakeholders toward common goals.

Communication describing the rationale for closing the search, even after the selection has been made, can add legitimacy according to Reese, who described how the “search committee and the board of trustees . . . report[ed] out the integrity of the process behind the scenes.” Other colleges and universities may consider similar communication

strategies, by reporting the work of the search firm, the processes used to vet the candidates, and the level and degree of engagement from those on the search committee.

Recommendation 6: If Conducting an Open Search, Institutions Should Delay the Public Announcement of Candidates to Increase the Candidate Pool

One participant, Rory, described ways his institution conducted a search process that dealt with concerns about confidentiality and ensured the community had the opportunity to engage with the search process and candidates. Rory offered that his institution conducted an open search but kept the deliberations about the selection process completely confidential until just before the final three candidates came to campus to meet with stakeholders. Only immediately before a candidate was to visit was the candidate's name and curriculum vitae released to the larger community. By making such a decision, the institution was able to keep the pool of candidates protected while allowing stakeholders to engage with the candidates.

Recommendation 7: Institutions Should Evaluate Their Cultures Before Conducting Presidential Transition Processes

Institutions should consider conducting an evaluation of their cultures and missions at the beginning stages of the selection in order to develop selection processes that are consistent with those cultures and missions. The use of decision-making frameworks other than those common to an institution during the selection phase of the presidential transition process may cause the "anxiety" described by Mason. This anxiety was explained by Cohen and March (1974) who stated, "Socialization produces an expectation that presidents will share the values of their subordinates and the members of

important subgroups inside the college. . . . Disagreement with students or faculty is not only a political event for many presidents, it is also a problem of identity—and a surprise” (p. 25).

To lessen that anxiety, institutions should develop processes that are “true to their missions and cultures,” according to Blake. The understanding of an institution’s culture is important so that a potential candidate’s potential social match can be assessed. The use of “foreign” decision-making processes may decrease the ability of a presidential candidate to develop relationships with stakeholders. Understanding an institution’s culture may help an institution develop search processes that are consistent with that culture, increasing the likelihood that a president becomes socialized to the college or university community.

Recommendation 8: Senior Academic Leaders and Newly Selected Presidents Should Prioritize Private Meeting Time to Discuss the Academic Program

Senior academic leaders should ensure that the newly selected president and senior academic leader carve out formal time to meet. This practice will ensure that the two leaders prioritize the time, discussions, and the relationship between the two campus leaders. That time is a symbol to others and to both participants about the importance of the relationship and the information that needs to be shared.

The intentional scheduling of meetings may also encourage the senior academic leader to think through every possible issue a new president may need to be aware of. This intentional time provides the opportunity to ensure the two leaders will not take the onboarding processes “for granted,” as Harper worried. Instead, the time provides an opportunity for the senior academic leader to “coach” the incoming president about

campus issues, as Ryan stated, because the senior academic leader's "job in the process is to make good on the institutional investment in hiring the new leader," according to Blake. In this case, a senior academic leader was expected to provide institutional-level leadership. Senior academic leaders provide leadership during the presidential transition process by ensuring that academic needs are aligned with the needs of the college or university. By doing so, they help to ensure there is a return on the institutional investment in a newly selected president.

Recommendation 9: Governing Boards Should Prevent the Sitting President from Unduly Influencing the Transition Process

Sitting presidents should not attempt to unduly influence the transition process. They should allow other stakeholders who will work in the new administration to lead the process. The other stakeholders involved will have to work in an environment impacted by the new president and the processes that led to his or her selection. The former president will no longer be in a leadership position at the institution and will be less professionally impacted by the selection than will other stakeholders. It may be difficult for a president who spent a great deal of time and energy furthering the institution and who had developed hundreds or thousands of deep personal relationships to simply step away from the process and let others deliberate on such an important institutional decision. Some stakeholders may ask that the sitting president offer his or her opinions in hopes it may influence an aspect of the process.

To prevent this involvement, the board should play the role of arbitrator between the various groups of stakeholders. The board, given its responsibility to all stakeholders and its role in the final selection of a new president, is the proper group to take on that

task. This work by the board would prevent a sitting president from unduly influencing decisions or processes. The board can serve as an arbitrator only if it values the role of all stakeholders in the shared governance process. The board would benefit from training that describes shared governance in an academic environment and why the solicitation of stakeholder input is so important to major institutional decision-making processes. It is important to note that the sitting president may have an understanding of the institution and its needs that is not fully appreciated by others. That view is valuable and should be captured by the search consultants, who can objectively analyze that view compared with the views of other stakeholders. It would also be beneficial to the newly selected president if the sitting president provided time and insight describing issues and concerns facing the institution and the institution's new leader.

Recommendations for Research

The results of this study provide ample opportunity for future studies to inform practitioners about the impact of decision-making during the presidential transition process. A qualitative study using a similar semistructured interview format that examines the experiences and interpretations of board members at multiple selective, private, nonprofit colleges and universities who were in a decision-making capacity during a presidential transition would add additional insight into the topic. Such research would add new perspectives describing how those on the board made decisions. It would add insight into the frameworks used when weighing confidentiality versus transparency and the way in which stakeholder voices and concerns were weighed during all phases of the process.

Those findings could be used as a point of conversation between board members and senior academic leaders. Kezar (2004), Gumport (2000), and Labaree (1997) described the tension present in higher education caused by priorities other than the academic mission. If there were differences in interpretations between the senior academic leaders in this study and board members in future studies, the research would provide a basis for discussion. Understanding where during the process those divergent opinions occurred, and what caused those differences, would allow practitioners to design presidential transition processes that incorporate the concerns of all parties while providing decision-makers with information to help facilitate communication with all stakeholders. As an example, it might be helpful to communicate that boards have increasingly used closed presidential searches to deal with confidentiality issues because they are concerned not just that qualified candidates may be lost but that the quality and depth of the candidate pool impacts the speed of the search process and the negotiating position of the institution. Senior academic leaders may be more understanding of those decisions if the views of the decision-makers were explained fully.

Another study to build on this research could address whether the type of process impacted the success of a presidency. Two types of studies would be appropriate. The first would be a quantitative study that examined the type of presidential transition process and then compared it to measurable indicators of institutional success at similar private, selective nonprofit colleges and universities. Some of those measures would include length of service for a president, student retention rates, admissions applications, yield rate of those applicants, research funded and conducted, and fundraising success. Such a study would be able to include more presidencies across a larger number of

institutions, making the results more generalizable. Because a president may or may not be directly responsible for those indicators and because the success of an institution and an academic presidency is subjective, qualitative analysis would also be appropriate and helpful in answering those questions.

Case studies conducted several years after a presidential transition that examine the experiences and interpretations of multiple stakeholders at an institution would also be appropriate. Those studies would provide additional insight into the way the selection process impacts the way the president is able to develop relationships with stakeholders and the degree to which those relationships help the president achieve success, as defined by multiple stakeholders.

Summary and Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of senior academic leaders during the presidential transition process. Those experiences were analyzed through the frames of organizational decision-making. By identifying the frames that were and were not present during the transition process, the research suggests that tension between academic and market values (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004) did exist during this major institutional decision. The tension was present when institutions made decisions using frames not commonly used in academia. The use of those frames was inconsistent with academic values and risked failing to capture input from all stakeholders. When processes fail to capture input and develop consensus, there is a risk that the new president will not develop relationships with stakeholders, become socialized to the new role and environment, and make informed decisions that weigh all possible outcomes. Failure to achieve those goals can also lead to the selection being viewed as illegitimate. That view

stifles the engagement of stakeholders, making it difficult for the institution to marshal all resources to achieve its identified goals.

To mitigate those concerns, those leading presidential transition processes should use a collegial decision-making frame to capture the views of all stakeholders, consistent with the decision-making frame used in academia. Those who lead these processes must make multiple decisions: they choose which members of the community write and review the prospectus, serve on the search committee, and meet with the new president shortly after he or she is selected. Those decisions affect the issues prioritized by the board and new president and the way stakeholders are engaged in those initiatives.

A process that benefits from a wide range of inputs will provide better vetting of candidates, a more complete picture of institutional challenges and opportunities, and an opportunity for the newly selected president to establish positive relationships with stakeholders. Those relationships will add to the legitimacy of the process and the presidency. A president who benefits from a process that provides relationships, information, and legitimacy is well positioned to serve the institution with the integral leadership described by the AGB (2006) that binds stakeholders to move the institution forward to meet the timeless goals of teaching, research, and service.

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APPENDIX A:
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

The conceptual format of this email was taken from research conducted by doctoral student Vernon Williams (2014).

Dear (Title/Name of Senior Academic Leader),

I am a student pursuing an Ed.D. at The George Washington University and am studying the presidential transition process. The purpose of the research is to understand and describe the experiences of senior academic leaders in the presidential transition process. Those experiences will be analyzed through the identified frames of organizational decision-making. Your experiences as [title at institution] can add valuable insight into this study. Your participation will add to the existing literature and help inform practice supporting academic involvement in organizational decision-making.

Our discussions will be kept strictly confidential. In order to protect your identity, your personally identifiable information will not be shared with anyone else. You will also have the opportunity to review the written transcripts taken from our discussion to ensure the accuracy of information. Your statements, along with the views of other senior academic leaders, will be analyzed for common themes. The research findings will be presented in my doctoral dissertation.

I appreciate your support and participation in assisting me to complete this project. I would be happy to talk with you over the phone at your convenience. The conversation should take no more than 30 minutes. Please let me know if you have any questions. I can be contacted at pemberton.ryan@gmail.com or (434) 603-2848.

Sincerely,

Ryan Pemberton
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX B:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The format of the protocol was taken from Williams (2014). The basis for the questions related to the decision-making process came from Keeney (2012).

Sample Script

Good morning/afternoon,

Thank you so much for your time! I know how busy you must be, and I am grateful for your willingness to speak with me. As you know from our email communication, my name is Ryan Pemberton and I am a doctoral student at The George Washington University and am conducting research on the presidential transition process and the way in which senior academic leaders interpreted organizational decision-making during the various processes as part of the transition.

As a reminder, this interview will be recorded so I can capture all of your views and provide you with my complete attention. All information you provide will be maintained confidentially so you will not be identified. You are welcome to stop the interview at any time. This information will be published as part of my dissertation. You may request a copy of this transcript and my subsequent analysis. By conducting this interview, you are providing your informed consent, which is consistent with the consent document provided by email. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Question Group 1: The Presidential Transition Process Experience

1. Please describe your personal involvement with the transition process. Specifically, please describe your personal involvement in each of the following phases of the process. (Prompt: Provide the participant with a definition of all phases of the presidential transition. Reflection: the time when an institution assesses its needs. Selection: the processes of choosing a new president. Onboarding: the time when the new president learns about the institution and its needs; the period between the selection and official start date.)
2. How were the opinions, ideas, etc., of various stakeholder groups captured during the stages of the transition process? Specifically, how were student, staff, and faculty opinions, ideas, etc., captured during the various stages of the process?
3. Were there any other important stakeholder groups who were engaged during the various phases of the transition process? Follow-up: How was each of those stakeholder groups engaged during the various phases (reflection, selection, and onboarding) of the transition process? Can you give me an example to help clarify the process for me?
4. Who formally and informally led the transition process? Follow-up: Were the formal leaders of the transition process the same as the informal leaders?
5. Were any groups particularly pleased or frustrated with the process? If so, why?

6. Please describe how aspects of the process were communicated to stakeholder groups on campus. (Prompt: Examples may include candidate visits, formal meetings to identify a position description, and meetings with the newly elected president.)
7. What was your overall reflection of the process? Follow-up: What were the strengths and weaknesses of the process? What lessons were learned? Did the process change over the course of the various phases?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Question Group 2: Decision-Making

1. What role did intuition play in the decisions associated with the presidential transition process? (*Intuition*. I will provide the participant with a description of the intuition decision-making framework: According to Keeney (2012), decisions in this framework are characterized as being made rapidly, and those making the decisions do not have the ability to describe the steps leading to the decision.)
2. What role did luck and opportunity play in the strategic decision-making process associated with the presidential transition process? (*Garbage-can*)
3. What role did formal consultation play in the decision-making processes? What role did group decision-making play in the processes? (*Collegiality*)
4. What role did the institution's culture play in the decision-making processes associated with the presidential transition process? (*Culture*)
5. What role did politics play in the strategic decision-making processes associated with the presidential transition? (*Politics*)
6. What role did procedures and rules play in the strategic decision-making processes associated with the presidential transition? (*Bureaucracy*)
7. What role did data and information play in the strategic decision-making processes associated with the presidential transition? (*Rationality*)
8. I have asked you about several ways decision-making may have occurred during the presidential transition process. Is there another way that you saw decision-making taking place?
9. Have I missed anything with my questions?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Reminders:

- Thank participants for their time and insight.
- Remind the participants that they can access the transcript and analysis.
- Remind the participants that they have contact information should they have further questions or concerns.

APPENDIX C:
CONSENT FORM

The conceptual format of this form was taken from research conducted by doctoral student Vernon Williams (2014).

Principal Investigator: Robert Chernak, Ed.D.
Sub-Investigator: Ryan Pemberton

1. Introduction

Colleges and universities face very challenging environmental pressures. The way in which institutions deal with these pressures is important to study. This research opportunity is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Robert Chernak of the Higher Education Administration Program, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, The George Washington University (GWU). Please read this form and feel free to ask any questions. Your involvement in the study is completely voluntary, and you can decide not to participate or to terminate your involvement at any time.

2. Why is this study being conducted?

This study is being conducted to better understand the way senior academic leaders describe and interpret their involvement in the presidential transition process. That understanding can inform research and practice surrounding the presidential transition process, as little empirical research on the subject has been conducted.

3. What is involved in this study?

If you decide to participate in this study, the subinvestigator will interview you about your experience with the presidential transition process. The interview will be recorded and last approximately 30 minutes and be conducted over the phone. The recording will be transcribed, and all identifying information will be removed. Only the subinvestigator and the participant will read the transcript, in order to ensure accuracy.

4. What are the risks of participating in the study?

The study has been designed to minimize potential risk for participants. All personally identifiable information will be removed from the public documentation. The transcripts will be kept separate from the list of participants. Participants may refuse to answer questions, take breaks, or remove themselves from the study at any point.

5. What are the benefits of participation?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants may learn more about the topic of the research. Participants may also help inform practice and research about the presidential transition process.

6. Will I receive payment for being in this study?

There is no compensation for participation in the interview.

7. How will my privacy be protected?

The records and any identifiable information provided in the interviews and subsequent analysis will be kept confidential. Participants will be assigned an identifier, which will be kept separate from the analysis. All identifiable information will be shredded after final publication, according to GWU Office of Human Research guidelines.

8. Problems or questions?

The Office of Human Research at GWU can provide additional information about your rights as a research participant. Additional information can be obtained by contacting the subinvestigator, Ryan M. Pemberton, at rmp00@gwu.edu or by calling (434) 603-2848.

9. Prompt for participant verbal consent

By providing your oral consent prior to being interviewed, you will confirm that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read this document, that your questions have been satisfactorily answered, and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

Investigator Statement

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of his or her questions have been answered. It is my opinion that by this oral consent the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits, and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Student Researcher

Date of Informed Consent