Visions Of Vision: An Exploratory Study Of The Role College And University Presidents Play In Developing Institutional Vision.

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Dedication

The author wishes to thank her wonderful husband Dr. Walter Kuklinski, sister Patricia McWade, son Zack McWade, many good colleagues and friends and, of course, Mikey for their support throughout this process.

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Abstract of Dissertation

Visions Of Vision: An Exploratory Study Of The Role College And University Presidents Play In Developing Institutional Vision.

This qualitative research explores how college and university presidents engage in the process of developing formal institutional vision. The inquiry identifies roles presidents play in vision development, which is often undertaken as part of strategic-planning initiatives. Two constructs of leadership and institutional vision are used to examine key variables such as vision development and the college presidency.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 10 presidents representing private and public institutions that have been or are being transformed. These interviews revealed 21 findings arrayed as: 1) seven organizing modalities, 2) five presidential roles, 3) seven role-based success factors and 4) two issues concerning balancing ownership of vision between presidents and stakeholders in shared-governance environments.

Many of the presidents developed formal institutional visions narrowly and on their own, but then undertook more inclusive processes to finalize their visions, socialize them through their organizations and integrate them into strategic planning. A related finding is that, despite pressures to engage in vision development with a broad spectrum of their communities, presidents are routinely asked to provide their visions to trustees and others during job recruitment.

Other findings include confirmation that visioning is generally part of strategic-planning exercises. Presidents often think in terms of what this study labels visionary intent, identified here as the combination of formal vision, objectives and strategies. Presidents also report relying on outside experts to play roles in visioning and strategic

planning. Some presidents also spoke of balancing the need to encourage creativity and ambition among those engaged in the process with a responsibility to protect their institutions against misguided or even dangerous visions.

Numerous implications for both practice and theory emerged from this research. These include how essential it is for presidents to understand the cultural, political, historical, financial and operating contexts of their institutions prior to embarking on visioning. This includes awareness of the dynamics and visioning efforts of their immediate predecessors.

The presidents ultimately chose different courses of action to develop vision, though they all shared many best practices. In theoretical terms, this reflects an interesting Contingency Leadership approach to visioning in Complexity Leadership environments marked by the considerable Shared and Servant Leadership characteristics of shared governance.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." U.S. President John F. Kennedy invoked this passage from Proverbs 29:18 in 1963 to underscore the profound yearning people seem to have for an espoused collective destination – a vision.

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* the Cheshire Cat warned Alice of the challenges of being without a destination when he said that if you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there. Management consultants have long invoked this folk wisdom to suggest the importance of stated institutional vision to employee engagement and organizational success.

This dissertation examines institutional vision. It does so against the backdrop of more than 40 years of opinion by scholars and practitioners on the essential role vision plays in organizations and, particularly, on the purportedly crucial leader role in developing, communicating and implementing institutional vision. It also stems from the recognition that organizations of every type – public, private and nonprofit – are investing extraordinary amounts of money and time and no shortage of frustration in crafting institutional vision.

Most theoretical foundations and conceptual frameworks in the leadership and higher education literatures – and certainly in popular leadership and management publications – seem to assume necessary roles both for institutional vision and the leader's job in crafting institutional vision. Yet, Kantabutra (2010) underscored the nascent stage of research into this issue in higher education indicating that, "Empirically, no published studies have linked vision components specifically to educational institution

performance, which is critical since vision has been emphasized as key to performance throughout the educational leadership literature" (p. 376).

Claims about the importance of institutional vision to colleges and universities are inescapable. A 2005 survey of college presidents by Maguire Associates and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, for example, found respondents placing "a strong vision of your institution's mission" among the top three attributes considered most important to their presidency. "Vision" (43%) was joined by "strong leadership ability (50%) and "interpersonal skills" (45%) as the top three attributes. No other entry on a lengthy list of qualities exceeded 12 percent.

By the late 1990s, the higher education literature joined the general leadership literature in reflecting interest in institutional vision. Nelson (2007) said about articles on the college presidency that, "Regardless of the genre, rarely do more than a few pages in any book about leadership go by before the reader confronts the word vision" (p.28). Echoing President Kennedy's sense of the innate human need for vision, McLaughlin (2004) of Harvard University's Seminar for New College Presidents said that, "Presidents as leaders respond to this deep need in people to feel connected to something bigger than themselves" (p. 7).

Barone (2005) wrote that, "The more successful (college) presidents are those who are capable of capturing a bold vision that casts their institution into a protagonist role" (p. 24). Hawkins (2007) asserted that college "leaders need to have a dream, a vision, but more important they need to make sure that this is a shared dream" (p. 54). Bornstein (2008) called for presidents with the ability to develop coherence, "where the need is not

just analysis but synthesis – an ability to see the big picture, to cross boundaries, and to combine disparate ideas into a new vision" (p. A30).

This dissertation is compelled by both this ongoing, clarion call for vision coupled with what seems to be insufficient existing research on leader roles in developing it. Kantabutra (2010) was among the first scholars to focus comprehensively on vision in higher education, reinforcing the need for greater research on this subject. He wrote, "Examining what constitutes an effective vision, particularly in the education sector, has not been sufficiently studied, yet this is critical to researchers and practitioners who wish to understand the relationship between visionary leadership and organizational performance" (p. 377).

Yet, the theoretical foundations found in the leadership and higher education literatures suggest rather pervasively – but not necessarily persuasively – that institutional vision and the leader role in developing it are vital precursors to organizational success.

Without sufficient research to prove (or disprove) such claims, colleges and universities – and their presidents and boards of trustees – continue to tout the importance of institutional vision, though largely in anecdotal terms. This comes without sufficient research revealing (or not) correlated or even potentially causal relationships between organizational success and vision or the leader role in developing vision.

Additionally, the field appears to lack a substantive guide informed by scholarship and empirical research on how college and university presidents can best develop institutional vision. Focusing on these "how" and "how to" questions in this research may also help to confirm or, perhaps, contradict the general assumptions that institutional vision and the leader role in its development are essential. These exploratory research

outcomes will create fertile ground for future, specific research of this leader-vision phenomenon.

Problem Statement

Three large, perplexing problems emerge from the literature and from years on the author's part observing and studying college and university presidents and their roles in vision development: 1) the growing, time-consuming complexity of the college presidency, which raises concerns about a leader's ability and even willingness to find the time to engage in visioning well, 2) shared-governance structures that can place presidents at odds with highly empowered stakeholders such as faculty and alumni and raise concerns about appropriateness and ownership of the vision and the vision-development process, and 3) a perceived and certainly ironic gap between the importance placed on institutional vision by scholars and practitioners and, in reality, the limited amount of available research designed to prove the value of doing so. Furthermore, there may be another paradox between the stated importance of formal institutional vision and, seemingly, the utility of vision statements in actually informing strategic and operational decision making on campus in real and practical terms.

The first problem is that the college presidency has grown in complexity, with claims by scholars and practitioners alike of enormous and even unrealistic expectations placed on presidents and unlimited demands made on their time. An unattributed quote from a president in the 2005 survey of college and university presidents by Maguire Associates and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* captures well the multitude of frustrating challenges presidents face:

> On any given day I might have to deal with complex intellectual issues and complaints about a toilet overflow somewhere. The range of issues is huge, along with the range of knowledge and skills we are expected to bring to the tasks, all with the drive to create change, the humility to let others think it is their idea, the smooth talking helpful graciousness of a Nordstrom saleslady and the tenacity of the Red Sox. Good job for someone with a short attention span and large capacity for the absurd. (p. 1)

Relating to these frustrations, the late Bart Giamatti, former Yale University President, once suggested that "being president of a university is no way for an adult to make a living. It is to hold a mid-nineteenth century ecclesiastical position on top of a late-nineteenth century corporation" (Padilla & Ghosh, 2000, p. 35).

Having put an even finer point on it decades earlier, Upton Sinclair (1923) opined with characteristic bluntness that the college president "spends his time running back and forth between Mammon and God" (p. 386).

The second problem concerns the shared-governance structure of higher education, which can add difficulty to any president's attempt to develop vision. In stressing the importance of governance and what she calls the "incorporation" of faculty and other constituencies – such as senior staff and powerful alumni – into vision development, McLaughlin (2004) wrote that "presidents serve at the point of intersection of many diverse constituencies with differing, competing, or colliding priorities, intersects, values, and perspectives" (p. 6).

The governance issue also raises concerns as to whether presidents are – or should be – developing their own vision or serving as catalysts and synthesizers for a more inclusive, representative and collectively derived vision in the full spirit of shared governance. Given sometimes daunting shared-governance challenges that are unique to higher education, one might further question the willingness and even the ability of most

college and university presidents to engage campus communities in effective vision-development initiatives capable of producing shared vision that transcend the president or any one of many powerful stakeholder groups. The underlying question of whose vision it is – or should be – is central to this examination.

A third problem is the interesting paradox that seems to exist between the stated importance of institutional vision by scholars and practitioners and both the lack of evidence to support the assertion as well as the application of vision and vision statements in the daily conduct of business on campus. From observation over many years on the researcher's part, it seems that too many vision-development exercises consume great time, resources and energy – and considerable frustration – without producing specific, realistic vision statements that can be used by presidents, their executive teams and employees to make decisions about difficult trade-offs and allocate constrained resources effectively. Indeed, one might argue that too many vision-development processes on campus produce vision statements that are generic, undifferentiated from the competition and incapable of informing meaningful decision-making. This feeling is palpable to most individuals who have worked at senior levels in colleges and universities. And yet, even within education, scholars such as Hallinger and Heck (2002) among others continue to assert the importance of vision to organizational performance.

These complex, overlapping and perplexing problems raise substantial questions about how college and university presidents view their roles in developing institutional vision and actually undertake those roles. These include whether and how they make time for substantive vision-development initiatives, how they address contentious issues of

inclusion and governance, and whether and how they use their institution's formal vision to guide actual decision making.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to explore how college and university presidents engage in vision development. This inquiry seeks to identify and prioritize the various roles presidents play, think they are playing or think they should be playing in vision development, which is often undertaken as part of larger strategic-planning exercises. This study is exploratory and somewhat conjectural in nature, largely because of the limited existing research on the subject. The research is further delimited by focusing on presidents who have led or otherwise undergone at least one visioning or related strategic-planning process at a four-year, nonprofit higher education institution in the past seven years.

The four exploratory research questions to be examined are:

1. How do presidents organize and prepare for their vision-development processes?
2. What roles do presidents ascribe to themselves in developing institutional vision?
3. What are the primary success factors that shape successful presidential roles in developing institutional vision?
4. Do presidents believe their institution's vision should reflect their vision, a broader, inclusive vision incorporating opinions from many of the institution's stakeholders, or a hybrid of these elements?

Significance of the Study

This research has significance in three domains. First, institutions and their leadership teams are investing large amounts of money and considerable executive and staff time developing formal institutional vision. It is hoped that this research will help presidents and their executive teams improve how they do so and, in general, help catalyze conversations among presidents, leadership teams and boards of trustees on how best to create meaningful vision.

Second, these research findings will be available to the large number of new presidents who are now taking office – or soon will be – and embarking on visioning and related strategic-planning exercises of their own. Jacqueline E. King, director of the American Council on Education's (ACE) Center for Policy Analysis emphasized the aging of the college presidency and points to a new wave of retirements now underway that can serve as a major force for change in higher education (Williams June, 2007). The demographics emphatically support widespread changes at the top of U.S. institutions, ushering in what Padilla and Gosh described as the revolving door of the academic presidency (2000).

Many new, often first-time presidents – and the boards of trustees, presidential search committees and executive recruiters who hire them – will be searching for best-practice and case-history evidence and experience to help them design their own successful vision-development initiatives.

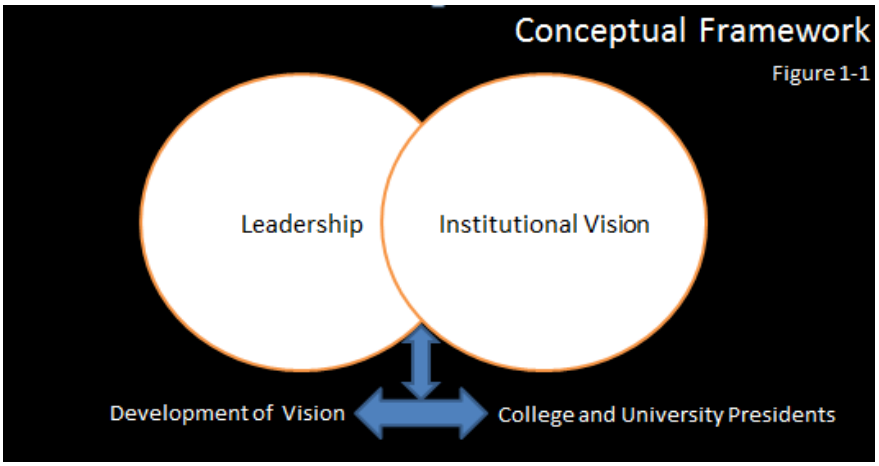
Third, an assertive though largely unempirical case has been made by scholars and practitioners about the importance of formal institutional vision and leader engagement in

it for several decades now. For example, Sashkin (1995), Baum et al. (1998) and Kouzes and Posner (2002) argued over recent decades in support of the key role of vision in leadership and organizational success. Other scholars and practitioners subsequently addressed the importance of vision and leader engagement in vision in terms of "visionary companies" (Collins & Porras, 1994), "destination and delivery" (Useem, 1998), "visions as attractors" (Fullan, 2001), "crystallized intent." (Senge et al., 2004), and "strategic intent" (Hamel & Prahalad, 2005). It is hoped that this research will start a process intended either to corroborate these assertions or question them, at least in the context of higher education.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research is based on two constructs – leadership and institutional vision. The variables under exploration supporting these two constructs are college and university presidents and the development of institutional vision in higher education (Figure 1). This conceptual framework is used as the basis for examining the development of institutional vision by college and university presidents. It does so recognizing that both the leadership and higher education literatures reference the leader role in vision development with surprising infrequency, though there is moderate discussion of vision generally found in the leadership literature and clear support for its importance starting in the late 1970s.

Figure 1 – Conceptual Framework



Integration of the Two Constructs

Leadership theories of the 19th Century and much of the 20th Century – such as the Great Man, Traits, Behavioral, Contingency and Situational schools – were notable in their lack of reference to vision and vision development. It wasn't until Burns' (1978) groundbreaking work on Transformational Leadership that institutional vision became a significant feature in the scholarly conversation about leadership. Transformational Leadership scholars pointed increasingly to the importance of vision in organizations and, for example, to the need for visionary leaders (Peters and Waterman, 1987; Sashkin, 1995; Goleman at al., 2002; and Menand, 2010) or for leaders who understood the need to communicate institutional vision effectively (Kouzes and Posner, 1990; Baum et al., 1998; Argenti, et al., 2005; and Smythe, 2007).

Some scholars took the vision construct further, building it into their theoretical models about leadership as well as instruments used to measure leadership effectiveness. For example, Bass (1985) underscored the specific importance of leader roles in vision in the criteria he used to develop a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, which was among

the first attempts to measure specific components of Transformational Leadership. Of particular note was his use of the *inspirational motivation* and *idealized influence* criteria to highlight the utility of vision-based transformation. Yukl (1999) built on Burns' and Bass' work by suggesting the value of the employee role in co-developing institutional vision and strategy with leaders.

Key theories that emerged after Transformational Leadership, such as Servant Leadership and Complexity Leadership, called for sharing and distributing responsibility for certain leadership practices throughout the organization. The decentralizing qualities of some of these theories might have seemed to diminish what was believed to be the central role of vision and the leader role in its development under the Transformational Leadership model. This is especially true with Servant Leadership approaches of the 1980s that were less assertive about vision and the leader role in its creation. As leadership theory moved toward Complexity in the 1990s, however, vision and the leader role in its development regained the prominence it held within the Transformational Leadership framework. This was due to the fact that scholars believed that a widely shared, cohering ideology was essential for keeping an organization together and moving in the right direction when operating in the non-linear, emergent and often unpredictable context of complexity.

In general, however, creation of new knowledge in this domain has been limited by both the lack of empirical research on the relationship between leadership and institutional vision, especially on the leader role in vision development, and by the absence of a common definition for institutional vision. There has certainly been a steady albeit uneven progression in the scholarly definitions, understandings and applications of

leadership in the modern era – as referenced above and considered in some detail in Chapter Two. There has not been concomitant growth, however, in our collective understanding of institutional vision or, frankly, a consistent, empirical determination of the degree to which vision and leader roles in vision development are demonstrably consequential to an organization's performance beyond longstanding anecdotal claims.

Kantabutra (2010) made this point in noting the absence of any consensus definition for vision, which certainly complicates study of the subject. "Despite its apparent importance, vision definition is still not generally agreed on, which is an important issue because empirical research on vision may be affected by the various ways in which vision has been defined" (p. 377). Various scholarly characterizations and definitions of institutional vision are presented in the Literature Review.

Despite Kantabutra's (2010) admonitions about the nascent stage of research into the vision and vision-development phenomenon at colleges and universities, referenced above, the higher education literature does address at least one dimension of the problem – the importance of the leader role in fostering inclusion in the vision-development process. For example, case studies of vision and strategy development at Cleveland State University, Howard University and Philadelphia University (discussed below) underscore the stated need for collaborative inclusion among key stakeholders in the process.

Summary of Methodology

This is an exploratory, naturalistic inquiry that seeks to answer four research questions about how college and university presidents develop institutional vision. It is intended to help make sense of an issue that lacks much existing research and to lend

specific findings supported by thick, rich description to the subject to spur theorizing and additional future research.

The research population was comprised of current U.S. college and university presidents or presidents. These are leaders from approximately 2,900 four-year, degree-granting public and private institutions that are not structured as for-profit businesses in the U.S. Purposeful sampling techniques were employed to choose subjects who completed a visioning or related strategic-planning initiative at an institution as president in the past seven years.

Data were gathered through the administration of in-depth, open-ended interviews conducted by the researcher using a standardized interview guide. A total of 10 semi-structured interviews were completed, all of which were done on a face-to-face basis and, with one exception, occurred in each president's office. Data were collected using a digital-recording device as well as researcher field notes, and all computer files were backed-up using the Carbonite service.

This study utilized an inductive approach to data analysis, building from the content provided by college and university presidents during the interviews. Findings were developed by describing, interpreting and clustering the statements made by interviewees, which also enables the reader to arrive at their own interpretations of the data. This study utilized Creswell's (1998) "data analysis spiral" to manage, analyze and represent the data and to generate findings. These findings emerged from coded, thematic clusters developed in response to the questions posed in the Interview Guide. Findings were then generated from an assessment of the relationships between and among the responses derived within each question.

The researcher works with college and university presidents and senior staff as a consultant and has some experience with vision development and strategic-planning initiatives undertaken by presidents. Every effort was made in this study to understand potential biases, achieve appropriate levels of objectivity and, ultimately, help ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

Limitations of the Study

There are three notable limitations to this research. First, the study is limited by design to higher education and, therein, to four-year, not-for-profit degree-granting institutions. While aspects of leadership, management, organizational behavior and human nature are shared by virtually all disciplines, professions, organizations and markets, the specific nature of the shared-governance issues addressed in this work make the study of vision in higher education a singular, highly differentiated and even idiosyncratic matter. Indeed, one is hard-pressed to find an applicable corollary in other fields of endeavor that quite matches the complex and sometimes contentious relationships between faculty members and senior administrators.

Second, the study is limited to the college and university presidency, which is subject to its own specific complexities and peculiarities. The transferability of these findings to other leadership positions even within the higher education context, such as provosts, may be limited and should also be undertaken with caution.

Finally, institutional vision within organizations can be seen to exist on a continuum from its development to its communication and ultimately to its implementation. That continuum likely also possesses a recursive dynamic in practice, which finds adjustments being made to the vision – as well as to its communication and implementation – as a

result of what is learned in actual implementation. For the purpose of this research, however, the two primary variables being studied concern the development of vision – not its subsequent communication or implementation – and the president's specific role in that development. These findings may aid the understanding of the communication and implementation variables and catalyze future research in those areas, too, but they are not formally part of this study. As such, these results should generally be confined to advancing understanding of the specific subject being studied – vision development and presidents' roles in it.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The conceptual framework for this research is based on two primary constructs: leadership and institutional vision. The higher education context for this work coupled with the focus of the four research questions generate the two primary variables under examination: college and university leadership and college and university institutional vision development.

Five databases were used to review the leadership and higher education literatures that, together, house the majority of the scholarly conversation about leadership of institutional vision (content) within higher education (context). These databases are ABI/INFORM, Business Source Premier (EBSCO), ProQuest Research Library, ProQuest Social Sciences Journal and the Dissertation Abstracts International.

This literature review focuses on five specific domains in support of the two constructs and two variables: 1) Leadership, 2) College and University Leadership, 3) Vision Development, 4) College and University Institutional Vision (within the Vision Development section), and 5) Institutional Vision. The leadership discussion provides a snapshot of key leadership theories over time, specifically referring to the absence, presence and nature of vision (and leader roles in developing vision) in each of those scholarly conversations.

This chapter is organized around these domains with key issues emphasized within each areas, such as the role of governance within college and university leadership, vision communication as part of the vision-development conversation, or vision statements as specific manifestations of institutional vision. Taken together, these five domains inform from many different angles how college and university presidents develop institutional vision.

Leadership

Leadership theories abound in the scholarly literature. At least six, broad theoretical categories can be aggregated from the early 20th Century to today, many of which until the most recent decades considered the question of whether great leaders are born or made (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). These theoretical categories are: Great Man and Trait Theories, Behavioral Theory, Contingency and Situational Theories, Transformational Theory, Servant Theory, and Complexity Theory.

Starting many decades ago, Bennis (1959) expressed a frustration within leadership studies that remains extant today, “Probably more has been written and less is known about leadership than about any other topic in the behavioral sciences” (p. 259-260). Smith et al. (2004) maintained that, “There is still no comprehensive understanding of what leadership is, nor is there agreement among different theorists on what good or effective leadership should be” (p. 80). Stogdill (from Yukl, 1999, p. 252) offered a comparable point of frustration: "There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.”

Early in this scholarly conversation, through the 19th century until the mid- 20th century, leadership was viewed in terms of top-down, one-way, command-and-control relationships between bosses and their subordinates. As the leadership discussion evolved, scholars such as Blake and Mouton (1981) said that leadership took the form of high-level, directive activities designed to maximize productivity, stimulate problem solving and, importantly, build morale and satisfaction. This focus on the morale and

satisfaction of followers presented more of a two-way relationship between leaders and followers. It also aligned very well with the contemporaneous work of Burns (1978) and other Transformational Leadership proponents who were focusing on the needs of followers and, importantly, starting to consider the role of shared vision in organizational success.

Locke (1991) built on this momentum around vision to advance the definitional discussion in the 1980s and ‘90s. He more forcefully asserted a definition of leadership that included the leader role in establishing vision for an organization and helping managers to implement that vision. This project embraces Locke’s strong vision orientation as central to the definition of leadership, though it does so in the context of giving vision specific purpose such as achieving the type of productive outcomes Blake and Mouton (1981) suggested. A working definition of leadership in the context of this research combines the Locke and Blake and Mouton conceptualizations: *Leadership is the development and communication of shared vision with the responsibility to help the organization achieve specific outcomes associated with that vision, such as maximizing productivity, stimulating problem solving, or building morale and satisfaction.*

Great Man and Trait Theories

Most attempts to understand leadership and why leaders are effective start with the Great Man Theory of the 19th and early 20th centuries and related Trait theories popular in the 1920s, ‘30s and ‘40s (Borgatta et al., 1954; Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Hirsch, 2002). With these theories, scholars believed that the capacity for leadership was inborn and manifest in the form of specific qualities, characteristics or traits. Great Man advocates maintained that leaders were influential and successful because, seemingly as a birthright,

they possessed extraordinary intelligence, charisma, bravery, wisdom and other positive characteristics and, in some characterizations, because they were serving God's will.

In this context, the historian and Great Man advocate Thomas Carlyle (1888) proclaimed that, "The history of the world is but the biography of great men" (p. 2). Carlyle maintained that leadership success – which he conflated with heroism – combined personal attributes with divine intervention to help the best leaders succeed under any circumstance. Indeed, so much biography and literature of the time, such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, asserted or implied that great leaders were simply following the dictates of Providence.

Spencer (1896) disagreed with Carlyle's formulation. He was among the first thinkers to believe that circumstance mattered and that context was central to the leadership conversation. He maintained that great men were often products of their times and that their success as leaders depended upon the specific social environment, which transcended whether they were born great leaders or not.

Trait theorists built on the Great Man scholarship to attempt to correlate the most prominent personal characteristics associated with leadership effectiveness (Zaccaro, 2007; Northouse, 2012). For example, scholars of the period found leadership status positively correlated with superior intelligence (Sward, 1933) and with subject-matter knowledge in its inventive and imaginative application to difficult, job-specific challenges (Drake, 1944). Flemming (1935) demonstrated weak but nonetheless noteworthy correlations between leadership effectiveness and the trait of adaptability. Even attributes such as tone-of-voice and talkativeness were studied for their relationships with leadership success during this period (Bass, 2008).

In exploring what they label the "controversial" history of Trait Leadership Theories, Kirkpatrick & Locke (1991) wrote that, "While research shows that the possession of certain traits alone does not guarantee leadership success, there is evidence that effective leaders are different from other people in certain key respects" (p. 48). The authors cite drive, integrity, self-confidence, cognitive abilities and knowledge of the business as among these key differentiators. Though rarely found in Traits Theory scholarship or even subsequent reviews of that scholarship, vision is referenced in the authors' early 1990s contention that leaders do need to, "Formulate an organizational vision and an effective plan for pursuing it" (p. 48).

In general, however, there was virtually no discussion of vision or the relationship between traits and vision or vision development when either Great Man or Trait Theories dominated the leadership conversation.

Behavioral Theories

The next theoretical progression can be found in Behavioral Theory of the 1940s, '50s and '60s. This thinking started to emphasize that, in fact, leaders could be "made," leadership could be taught, and successful leaders were not simply born that way (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Northouse, 2012). Behavioral Theory described what leaders actually did (Burmeister, 2003) and not as much on who they were as measured by intelligence, personality or other trait-based criteria.

Both Ohio State University and the University of Michigan undertook vast studies of leadership behaviors at the time, cataloguing as many as 2,000 specific behaviors (Hemphill & Coons, 1957, from Burmeister) that, in theory, could be objectively observed, measured and learned. However, as Nahavandi (2000) wrote, the links between

behaviors and successful leadership outcomes could never be established. In this sense, Behavioral Theory focused on leadership description rather than prescriptions for how to engage in leadership effectively.

One prominent derivative of Behavioral Theory included Path-Goal Theory. Here, it was theorized, leaders choose to behave in various ways (directive, supportive, participative and achievement-oriented) to advance specific organizational goals (House & Mitchell, 1974). In doing so, leaders coach, mentor, motivate, and reward employees, compensate for capability gaps in the organization, remove obstacles and, ultimately, lead by example (Northouse, 2012). One would think that linking paths to goals – or one could say journeys to destinations – would, of necessity, underscore the prominence of vision in articulating goals and intentionally animating how to achieve them. Yet Path-Goal thinking was silent on the subject of vision.

The notion of skills also started to emerge in scholarly conversation about leadership at the time. These conversations raised contextual questions about whether leaders possessed the right skills to achieve needed behaviors. This was an especially noteworthy departure in ontological terms because, in this view, skills could actually be learned and thus leaders could transcend the constraints of Great Man Theory or even Trait Theory that tied success to natural-born proclivities or even the will of God. Katz (1955) was among the first to examine leadership skills in this regard, separating them from traits and ascribing leadership effectiveness to technical, human and conceptual skills. Katz stated, "Skills imply what leaders can accomplish whereas traits imply who leaders are" (from Northouse, 2004, p. 36).

Still, nowhere does vision or the leader role in developing it seem to be among the important skills considered at the time. In general, and once again, Behavioral Theory and contemporaneous discussions of skills were largely silent on the subject of vision.

Contingency and Situational Theories

Emerging in the 1960s and '70s, Contingency and Situational theories presented a more nuanced approaches to the understanding of leadership (Hersey, 1985; Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Northouse, 2012). Here, leadership performance was not seen as simply an outgrowth of natural-born greatness, positive traits or behaviors. Rather, these theories considered the relationship between leaders and their particular context, building on Spencer's earlier wisdom. They asserted that certain kinds of leadership qualities are best suited to certain types of tasks, conditions and environments.

Fiedler and Chemers (1974) called this phenomenon Leader-Match theory, which attempts to match leaders to appropriate situations. Northouse (2004) said that this school of thought is referred to as contingency, "because it suggests that a leader's effectiveness depends on how well the leader's style fits the context" (p. 109). At least three leadership factors emerge in the Contingency Theory discussion – leader-member relations, task structure and positional power – but none of them make substantive reference to vision or vision development.

Contingent reinforcement is one aspect of these theories. This approach concerns rewarding employees for completing tasks successfully and reprimanding them for not doing so. Bass (2008) wrote that leaders in these situations, "arouse positive emotions in followers by consistently applying contingent reinforcements and generating mutual liking" (p. 366). In these scenarios, followers are assumed to be motivated by a leader's

ability and willingness to help them achieve personal gain rather than by an organization's or leader's inspiring vision.

While these theories evolved the discussion of leadership considerably beyond the inborn or innate aspects of Great Man and Trait Theories as well as the mid-century focus on Behaviorism, they also remained relatively silent on the matter of vision and vision development.

Transformational Theories

By the late 1970s, Burns (1978) broke new ground as among the first proponents of Transformational Leadership. Transformational Leadership placed significant emphasis on the needs of followers who, together with the leader, could transform an organization, a community or even a nation. Burns wrote that, "The transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy (their) higher needs and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation" (p. 4).

Burns contrasted Transformational approaches with Transactional Leadership that focuses on shorter-term, status-quo exchanges and is not concerned with fundamentally changing the future or placing leaders and followers on a common, vision-based path. In this sense, Transactionalism seems more closely affiliated with the contingent reinforcement motivations described above. Here, a deal or mutual understanding of some kind is constructed in which one party (employee) performs a service for another party (employer) and receives consideration for accomplishing that task (paycheck). In this context, vision does not seem particularly relevant to Transactional Leadership approaches.

Transformational Leadership theories, however, served as a powerful and unambiguous gateway to opening discussions about the role of vision in leadership. Smith et al. (2004) wrote that, “Transformational leadership occurs when a leader inspires followers to share a vision, empowering them to achieve the vision, and provides the resource necessary for developing their personal potential” (p. 80). Hauser and House (2000) believed that the “development and communication of a vision is one explanation for the success of Transformational leaders and their effect on the performance” (p. 258).

Indeed, Bass (1985) underscored the specific importance of leader roles in vision in the four criteria constituting his Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, among the first attempts to measure specific components of Transformational Leadership. Of particular note in any conversation about vision was his use of the inspirational motivation and idealized influence criteria. Yukl (1999) later took the Burns and Bass formulations a step further by suggesting that employees can play co-developing roles with leaders in creating institutional vision and strategy.

Sashkin’s (1995) meta-analyses of various Transformational Leadership theories found three common personal competencies and three common behavioral competencies, with “visionary” qualities prominent within the former and “articulating clear vision” key to the latter. Sashkin (2006) used this analysis to build what he eventually called, itself, a new vision for leadership.

In their review of seven transformational leadership theories, Baum et al. (1998) echoed Sashkin in finding that two of the three common characteristics shared by many key leadership theories concern vision. The authors contend that both ”communicating a vision” and “taking various actions intended to implement the vision” (p. 2) are

paramount components of transformational leadership. However, Baum et al. (1998) did not speak to specific leader roles in developing vision.

Nonetheless, Burns and his contemporaries ignited the conversation about leadership and vision in the late 1970s and extended it well through the ‘80s and ‘90s. As such, Transformational Leadership was the first of the broad leadership theories to treat vision substantively, integrate it into expectations for effective leaders and leadership and link it to organizational success.

Servant Leadership Theories

Numerous leadership theories emerged from the Transformational impulse of the late 1970s, ‘80s and ‘90s as, for example, questions about moral and ethical leadership intensified in the wake of the Watergate scandal and Vietnam War.

At their core, the most developed of these new theories often concerned the leader role in sharing, distributing or releasing organizational power. This thinking sometimes extended even to the reversing of traditional power relationships between leaders and followers, generally in diametric opposition to the linear, top-down formulations of Great Man, Trait, Behavior and Contingency Theories.

Conceived by Greenleef (1977) and, some claim, derived from certain spiritual and moral motivations (Wicks, 2002), Servant Leadership is a primary example of this trend. Greenleef believed that servant leaders were careful listeners, persuasive and able and willing to articulate and animate ideas effectively. These ideas include shared vision. Indeed, Laub (1999) identified six distinct components of Servant Leadership: 1) valuing people, 2) developing people, 3) building community, 4) displaying authenticity, 5) providing leadership and 6) sharing leadership. It is through the mechanism of sharing

leadership that Greenleef, Laub and other Servant Leadership theorists placed such importance on the leader role in envisioning the future and sharing that vision. Importantly, they also started to discuss the role of other people in the organization in envisioning the future and sharing vision, which is completely consistent with the tenets of the servant. In this manner, Servant Leadership started to distribute and decentralize vision development.

This focus on future orientation and shared vision is central to an understanding of Servant Leadership. Laub (1999) asserted that shared vision empowers people and responds to their needs, which is core to an understanding of Servant Leadership. Dennis (2004) cited the work of both Buchen (1998), who "pointed out that focusing on a future state was very important to Greenleaf's model and that servant leaders must be preoccupied with the future" (p. 6), and Bennett (2001), who "contended that the servant leader must dream while remaining in the past and focused on the future, because this allows the leader to take advantage of the opportunities of the present" (p. 6). In creating a Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument, Dennis also cited Patterson who included vision as one of seven "constructs of servant leadership" (p. 3).

Building on Greenleef and Laub, Smith et al. (2004) stated that Servant Leadership, "Views a leader as a servant of his/her followers. It places the interest of followers before the self-interest of a leader, emphasizes personal development and empowerment of followers" (p. 80). The authors argue further that Transformational and Servant Leadership Theories overlap in some areas, especially in their focus on charismatic leadership, and that Servant thinking can be seen as a logical outgrowth of the Transformational orientation. This is especially relevant as Servant Leadership, like

Transformational Leadership, places value on the importance of vision. Smith et al. wrote that, “The servant leader is a facilitator for followers to achieve a shared vision” (p. 80).

Servant Leadership and other significant theories that immediately followed Transformational scholarship focused on sharing, distributing, serving and even releasing executive power. These theories advanced the conversation about vision considerably, and they can be seen as logical progressions of the Transformational view of vision from only the leader’s prerogative. However, the fact that they emphasize collaboration and a sharing of responsibility and authority has the potential to confuse understanding of who ultimately owns responsibility for development of institutional vision.

Complexity Leadership Theories

New theories emerged in the 1990s based on a premise that, in Skarzauskiene’s (2010) words, “Effective decision making and learning in a world of growing dynamic complexity requires leaders to become systems thinkers – to develop tools to understand the structures of complex systems” (p. 49). A considerable degree of metaphorical thinking and dialogue developed at the time – that persists today – in which it is argued that leadership is best viewed (if not operationalized) through the lens of systems thinking (Dreachslin et al., 1994; Simpson, 2007). Here, Complexity Leadership scholars asserted, organizations should move from closed systems designed to exert control to open systems intended to optimize creativity and collaboration.

In this context, organizations are considered complex adaptive systems (Collier and Estaban, 2000; Englehardt and Simmons, 2002) and leadership and its analyses are undertaken at a systems level focusing on the dynamic, non-linear and emergent aspects of, for example, chaos theory or quantum mechanics (Styhre, 2002; Cooksey, 2003). This

has driven the leadership conversation, in Borzillo and Kaminska-Labbé's (2011) terms to focus "on the self-organization of interconnected driving forces operating far from equilibrium" (p.354). Interestingly, these concepts of "self-organization" and "operating far from equilibrium," however, could seem to run counter to perceptions of traditional, centralized leader roles in vision development.

Some Complexity Leadership scholars have moved the conversation past the edge of equilibrium-based environments, where central control remains extant, right to the edge of chaos, where creative emergence is deemed more desirable than traditional control. This view emphasizes the innovative benefits that accompany leadership practices and structures that seek to thrive in organic, ever-shifting and seemingly chaotic environments – what some have labeled the organizational equivalent of white-water rafting.

In his work on "quantum organizations," Youngblood (1997) wrote that these institutions "have found that the organic model, with its emphasis on responsiveness and creativity, is much better suited to this quantum world," adding that leader roles in this new realm must be oriented "to activities that promote the richest possible environment for self-organization to occur" (p. 8). Youngblood highlights three activities for which this new kind of leader is responsible: 1) establishing context, 2) disturbing the system and 3) cultivating the organization. In his view, this new kind of leadership "is not a position but a process" (p. 8).

It is within this first domain of "establishing context" that Youngblood, echoing other Complexity Leadership scholars, underscored the essential role of vision:

> Creativity and self-organization in living systems are contingent on having a clear identity – a context for taking action. In organizations,

> identity is established through purpose, principles, strategy, and culture, all of which come together in a 'shared vision' (p. 11).

This assertion helps address concerns over the lack or loss of vision stemming from matters of "self-organization" and "operating far from equilibrium" raised above. Indeed, Youngblood argued that vision is an essential glue that holds the organization together on the edge of chaos where, "through shared beliefs and intentions, people are able to act autonomously and remain in accord with the whole – thus drastically reducing the need for external controls. This is an area that bureaucratic organizations typically ignore" (p. 11).

Youngblood believed that traditional, bureaucratic organizations unwilling or unable to operate at the edge of chaos, risk cheapening vision:

> But ask any employee what the company's vision is, and how it affects his or her everyday job, and 99 out of 100 won't be able to tell you – and this includes the executives! This must change. A strong, well-understood, core ideology is vital to a Quantum Organization (p. 11).

In a 2007 case study on leadership and complexity, a decade after Youngblood's work, Peters referred to the uncertainty and creativity that marks life on the edge of chaos as "organizing in the mist" (p. 465). He described this terrain as one in which effective leaders know, "how to recognize and work with the qualities of participation, conversational life, anxiety, diversity and with unpredictability and paradox" (p. 465). But again, neither Peters nor other Complexity Leadership scholars minimized the role of vision. In fact, their orientation is quite the opposite. To engage in "participation" and "conversational life" well or to channel the benefits of "diversity" and creativity-generating "anxiety" effectively, organizations operating in complex environments need a clear, concise and shared vision.

While scholars of Servant Leadership certainly understood the benefits of vision, they seem less assertive about vision and about the leader role in developing it. Ironically, as leadership theory evolves toward ever-increasing decentralization and different modes of creative collaboration, Complexity Leadership Theory seems to have returned vision – and the leader role in its development, to some degree – to a more central place of prominence that it held in the Transformational Leadership community.

College and University Leadership

Dennison (2001) lamented the state of literature on the college presidency, offering that "much of the extant literature concerning the university presidency appears trivial at best and offensive at worst" (p. 270). In the period of time since Dennison's complaint, however, one can argue that the literature of the presidency has improved. For example, Bok (2013), the former president of Harvard University, has recently undertaken a sweeping assessment of higher education with specific reference to the presidency. Trachtenberg et al. (2013) considered "why university leaders fail and how to prevent it." Resnick Pierce (2012), the former president of the University of Puget Sound, authored a book "On Being Presidential." Bowen (2011) wrote about "lessons learned" from his presidency at Princeton University. Trachtenberg (2008), the former president of The George Washington University and Hartford University, focused his book on the college presidency. Padilla (2005) considered "six extraordinary university presidents, to name just a handful of more recent publications. So, Dennison's earlier claims of triviality in the college-presidency literature may be receding. Having said this, however, there remains precious little even in these new works on the role of the college president in vision development.

Increasing Pressures on the College Presidency

Key among the themes in the higher education literature is the view that the college presidency has grown in complexity in recent years, with enormous and even unrealistic expectations placed on presidents with seemingly unlimited demands made on their time (Dennison, 2001; McLaughlin, 2004; Chait et al., 2004; Duderstadt, 2007; Bruininks, 2010; Kantabutra, 2010; Bowen (2011); Resnick Pierce (2012). This phenomenon raises questions about the ability and willingness of presidents to engage in visioning, especially now amidst what are presented as such substantial, arguably epochal changes in higher education.

Indeed, these rising individual pressures result from growing demands placed on higher education to address widespread concerns about accessibility and affordability and to reform in response, observers and critics contend, to rising tuition and fees and increased competition among private, public and for-profit entities as well as distance-learning providers and overseas competitors. These emerging themes bring with them calls for more effective and efficient business-like practices in the leadership of colleges and universities (Lucas, 1994; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996; Bowen, 2011); Resneck Pierce (2012); Christensen & Eyring, 2011; Selingo (2013); Trachtenberg et al. (2013).

Plus, the rise of for-profit institutions such as the University of Phoenix provides just one example of the rapidly changing higher education landscape confronting presidents of traditional, not-for-profit institutions today. The growth of these entities has resulted in calls by some scholars and advocates for urgent reform of traditional higher-education delivery systems and, thus, dramatically increasing the complexity of the college presidency (Christensen & Eyring,

2011; Selingo, 2013).

Is it any wonder that the so-called great men or giants among college and university presidents of earlier generations evoked by Greenberg (1998), Dennison (2001), Nelson (2007) and Bok (2013) – "Robert Maynard Hutchins of the University of Chicago, who introduced the 'Great Books' approach to the curriculum and James Conant of Harvard, who helped create the National Science Foundation and advised national presidents" in Dennison's words (p. 269) – seem to have been chopped down to size today given these new, competitive market pressures? One wonders how it is even possible to develop compelling institutional vision today and, indeed, to be a visionary leader at all given such changes, controversy and concomitant existential questions of competitiveness and survival.

It is worth noting here, as well, that scholars and practitioners such as Trachtenberg et al. (2013) who have analyzed failed college presidencies, or what they call "presidencies derailed," report that a key factor in failure is not being able or willing to "demonstrate an appreciation for the heritage and culture of the enterprise" (p. 3). So, while many argue that today's academy must move into modernity and beyond these "great men" and their times, the failure to respect the history of higher education and of the specific institutions that presidents are leading can impair their effectiveness.

There is a clearly chorus of voices today arguing for the seemingly undeniable, vast new pressures on the college presidency. Of note, however, are a smaller number of scholars and practitioners like Bok (2013) who contend that some of these claims are "highly exaggerated" and "possessing little or no substance whatsoever (p. 384)." For example, Bok argues that dire commentaries about the failures concerning shared

governance, tenure, professors favoring research over teaching, the slow-moving, operationally conservative nature of universities or even that college costs too high are overstated and lacking in evidence.

Duderstadt (2010), the former University of Michigan president, reminds readers of the "continuity of change" (p. 7) and that, yes, this is certainly a "time of concern" in higher education, but that institutions and their presidents have long been challenged by vexing, seemingly intractable issues of their day. He asserts that dramatic change has always confronted the college presidency as, for example, "our nation shifted from an agricultural to an industrial economy, from a rural to an urban population, the needs of students and society shifted radically" (p. 8). Big thinkers like Bok and Duderstadt accept today's perilous competitive landscape; they are simply reminding observers that this has often been the case and nonetheless, in Duderstadt's words, "The university has endured as an important social institution" (p. 8).

Christensen and Eyring (2011) have been among the scholars calling most aggressively for dramatic, essential innovation in the leadership of colleges and universities today, a move to what they call the "innovative university." With these assertions, and in calling for changing the DNA of higher education from the inside out, they are also urging the hiring and rewarding of college and university presidents who can envision and shape success creatively amid ambiguity, divisive questions of accessibility and affordability and such potential large-scale change.

Building on Christensen's earlier work on disruptive innovation theory as well as on the recent laments of the state of higher education offered by Lewis (2006), Menand (2010) and others, the authors cite the paradoxical behaviors of universities and their

leadership that seem to dampen the kind of visionary innovation and change that is actually needed more than ever to ensure their future vitality – and even viability.

Trachtenberg (2008) wrote that, "The nature of the university is more complex and, in many ways, more vulnerable than that of other types of enterprises" (p. 261). Selingo (2103) dramatically accelerated this point and joined many others in recent years to exclaim that, "American higher education is broken." In comparing higher education to America's troubled auto industry, and in labeling it a "risk-averse, self-satisfied industry" (p. x), Selingo opined:

> The higher education industry is beset by hubris, opposition to change, and resistance to accountability. Even the leaders of colleges and universities think we're in trouble. More than one third of them say American higher education is headed in the wrong direction (p. x).

Calls for effecting entirely new ways of seeing and doing things in higher education – and some of these calls seem rather breathless and over the top – are coming amidst the ratcheting-up of external political pressures to innovate and reform. Christensen and Eyring (2011) cite the Bush Administration's 2006 *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* in which then-Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings upbraided higher education on these grounds:

> What we have learned over the last year makes clear that American higher education has become what, in the business world, would be called a mature enterprise: increasingly risk-averse, at times self-satisfied, and unduly expensive. It is an enterprise that has yet to address the fundamental issues of how academic programs and institutions must be transformed……It has yet to successfully confront the impact of globalization, rapidly evolving technologies, an increasingly diverse and aging population, and an evolving marketplace characterized by new needs and paradigms (p. 3).

Without using such pointed language, the Obama Administration has also been urging higher education leaders to engage in deep, lasting reform. At his January 24, 2012 speech on higher education at the University of Michigan, and later echoed in his

2012 State of the Union Address, the President warned (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2012):

> We should steer federal campus-based aid to those colleges that keep tuition affordable, provide good value and serve their students well. We are putting colleges on notice you can't assume that you'll just jack up tuition every single year. If you can't stop tuition from going up, then the funding you get from taxpayers each year will go down. We should push colleges to do better. We should hold them accountable if they don't.

College and university presidential vision development today must be seen through the lens of substantial change brought about by these new market realities and political pressures. Indeed, it is because of such disruptions, and not despite of them, that Bruininks et al. (2010) argued that the complexity made ever-more abundant by the Great Recession of 2008-2010 places an even greater premium on presidents who can develop animating, differentiating vision for their institutions. The authors echo Christensen and Eyring in contending that the new normal in higher education is marked by "changing demographics and spending priorities coupled with increasing competition and demands for accountability" that require presidents and their institutions to "embrace a clear vision of the future, including access and opportunity for all learners and a culture of entrepreneurship and service" (p. 113).

To the contrary, however, Greenberg (1998) noted that as these pressures find universities becoming "more like other businesses, their presidencies have attracted administrators and fundraisers more than scholars and visionaries" (p. 17). So, it can be argued that while today's changing environment requires visionary presidents playing far greater roles in vision development, it also creates potentially unrealistic conditions and expectations on the presidency while, paradoxically, placing limits on presidential powers that can make it very difficult for visionary leaders to succeed. Underscoring this point, McLaughlin (2004), who has labeled today's college presidency both the "perilous

presidency" (1996) and the "pressure-cooker presidency" (2006) suggested that "presidents have little real executive power. Even the best ideas and plans come into being not as a result of presidential declaration, but by presidential persuasion, McLaughlin contended. This point echoes Neustadt's (1961) historic contention that, at best, even the U.S. Presidency itself offers its occupant in this regard little more than broad powers of persuasion.

Many of these issues of accessibility and affordability, changing demography, increasing multifaceted competition and growing accountability in a 24x7 media culture were simply not matters with which Robert Maynard Hutchins, James Conant and the other so-called great men of vision considered by Greenberg, Dennison, Nelson and Bok had to confront in their days. Indeed, by comparison, scholars such as Dennison refer to today's presidents as "small men on campus" (p. 269) or "the shrinking college president" (p. 269), acknowledging that they lack the stature their predecessors enjoyed:

> Critics note that presidents today exhibit a career orientation, moving frequently from institution to institution, with the result that presidential tenure continues to decline at a relatively rapid pace. Given these increasingly brief terms, it should not cause surprise that presidents find it difficult to accomplish or even to define agendas (p. 269).

In this vein, the former President of Johnson State College Robert Hahn once quipped (Dennison, 2001) that today's "presidents are like baseball managers – they turn over often, are blamed for what they can't control, and are eagerly accepted by other organizations after they've been given a ticket out of town by their last one" (p. 270).

Finally, the growing demands of leading and managing institutions of higher education bring with them requirements to hire increasingly more talented people to meet these new challenges. Former Dickinson College President William Durden (2009, from

Weill) argued that a president's early approximation of vision and strategic destination is essential for attracting the best-possible leadership team. Durden is generally considered to have designed and led a turnaround of Dickinson College, mirroring the type of transformations that describe the institutions featured in this research:

> While I had some fairly concrete ideas about the type of ambitious and high-achieving individuals I needed for my guiding coalition, I also knew that I had to possess a developing sense of what I wanted to achieve at the college if I were to get them on my team. ….. I knew I had a bus to fill. But I placed a general destination sign on my bus to let those I wanted to attract know in which direction I was headed. And the direction I chose to advertise sent a clear message about my aspirations (p. 68).

Shared-Governance Issues

The literature paints a picture of higher education today in the midst of vast change and considerable turbulence. College and university presidents are often presented as less able and willing to engage in bold visioning at a time when it may be most needed, as referenced above. Indeed, with so many competing and sometimes conflicting demands placed on presidents, many observers wonder how they realistically find the capacity or the will to develop meaningful, actionable institutional visions.

Shared-governance expectations present singular leadership challenges for presidents unlike any other models found in business or even government. This critically important context of what they refer to as the "governance conundrum" tests what Bolman and Gallos (2011) say is the "everyday epistemology of how leaders come to know and understand their world and work, and how their humanity can limit or enhance their choices, tactics, and strategies" (p. 1). The authors asserted that:

> The differences between business and higher education do matter. Higher education's distinctive combination of goals, tasks, employees, governance structures, values, technologies and history make it not quite like anything else (p. 5).

In stressing the importance of shared governance and what she refers to as the incorporation of faculty and other stakeholders into vision development – the age-old inclusion or "buy in" argument – McLaughlin (2004) wrote that "presidents serve at the point of intersection of many diverse constituencies with differing, competing, or colliding priorities, intersects, values, and perspectives" (p. 6).

A key McLaughlin premise is that, "because in higher education, central authority is suspect and collaboration and collegiality are sacred values, college and university presidents must also operate in a third arena, governance" (p. 10) as distinct from the leadership and management requirements of most other professions and disciplines outside higher education." (p. 5). She added, "Although both leadership and management are important capacities for a president, a facility with governance is the sine qua non" (p. 10).

McLaughlin mirrors the work of Chait et al. (2004) who had more bluntly stated that, because of the dispersion of authority at the top of most colleges and universities, "the daily lives of faculty and many staff members are seldom directly affected by presidential visions" (p. B1). Indeed, Dennison pointed to higher-education governance issues as the compelling reason why this is the case today and why, in turn, the great men of the college presidency of the past invested with all manner of McLaughlin's central authority seem but a distant memory. "The checks and balances in campus governance prevent abuses, an outcome deserving of some respect. In the days of the giants, the faculty, students, and others frequently found themselves the objects *of* rather than the

participants *in* governance" (p 271) and, one might say by extension, in the development of vision.

Yet Trachtenberg (2008) asserted that presidents can go too far in accommodating the views and interests of all key stakeholders. He described as an "art form" the balancing between "when you need to listen to others and when you need to go your own way" (p. 49):

> People want you to acknowledge that they are stakeholders in the institution and they have a role in determining its direction. But sometimes, because you are thinking about the university all the time in a very intense way, you have to believe that your vision is more informed and thus the one to follow. It also matters that you are ultimately responsible (p. 49). It's a good thing for people to have a proprietary interest in the university, but it is also important that stakeholders understand that there must be a limit to their participation (p. 48).

Former Clayton State University President Thomas Harden (2009, from Weill) captured well the tensions found in these governance issues and in what he described as a meaningful number of presidents' antipathy toward faculty and vice versa. He wrote that, "Some presidents seem to be intimidated by the faculty and some presidents distrust the faculty" (p. 85). Harden added, "There are critics of many kinds among the faculty, and the nature of the president's position makes him or her particularly vulnerable to the criticism" (p. 86), which is useful context when considering the roles presidents play in crafting vision.

Bok (2013) wrote, however, that, "If one listens to what commentators say about shared governance, one can easily gain the impression that disagreement is the rule and the system is working very badly" (p. 59). He questioned what he refers to as the

"unsubstantiated claims that the practice of shared governance is in serious disrepair" (p. 383) or that there has to be a "governance conundrum," in Bolman and Gallos' words:

> Apparently, most universities do manage to make shared governance work. Otherwise, one would suppose that much larger percentages would regard the relationships between administrators and faculties as hostile and at loggerheads. Instead, the available evidence suggests that neither the complaints of professor-critics about the lack of faculty influence nor the concerns about endless gridlock expressed by some trustees and former presidents are well founded (p. 63).

Opinions on how essential it is for presidents to respect traditional governance structures are sometimes contradicted in reality. Take the case of President Jennifer Raab of Hunter College who, embroiled in controversy over her leadership style and facing opposition from key faculty and other stakeholders, told *The New York Times*, "I have a vision and I have always been very, very determined. I'm very tenacious" (Kaminer, 2013). This perspective animates a key research questions in this study – whether institutional vision is or should be that of the president, certain key stakeholders or a negotiated hybrid of consensus visions.

The shared-governance issue raises concerns as to whether presidents are – or should be – developing their own vision or serving as catalysts and synthesizers for a more inclusive, representative and collectively derived vision. It also brings into question the willingness and ability of presidents to pursue, in the words of Percy et al. (2006) "the power of the big idea" (p. 29), such as the authors' description of the success then-University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Chancellor Nancy Zimpher enjoyed with her bold vision for the "Milwaukee Idea," an institution-wide community engagement initiative focused on education, the economy and the environment.

Given sometimes daunting governance challenges that are unique to higher education, one might further question the willingness and even the ability of most college and university presidents to engage campus communities in effective vision-development initiatives capable of producing shared vision that transcends the president or any stakeholder group and that is, in reality, actually of value in making daily, operational decisions.

On this subject, Bolman and Gallos (2011) urge college and university presidents to take the unequivocal lead in developing a vision of where they want their institutions to go, "Knowledge is power; and academic leaders empower themselves when they know where they are, where they want to go, and what will get them there" (p. 9). In doing so, they present a conceptual framework of metaphors for leading colleges and universities, suggesting that successful presidents are those that know which leadership metaphor applies at any given time:

> It easier to understand colleges and universities when you learn to think of them simultaneously as machines, families, jungles, and theaters. The capacity to embrace multiframe thinking is at the core of the model of academic leadership effectiveness (p. 9).

Interestingly, Resnek Pierce (2012) cautions presidents not to paint shared-governance issues with too broad a brush by assuming, for example, that faculty relations are difficult everywhere. She urges presidents to accept that, "Every campus culture is idiosyncratic in the way that institutions practice shared governance" (p. 67). Her advice is to develop vision and strategy within a deep understanding of each specific institutional setting and context.

Still, Percy et al. (2006) contended that formal institutional vision and a strong president's ability to shape it were central to the much-touted success of Chancellor

Zimpher's Milwaukee Idea, referenced above. In Percy et al., Zimpher is credited with her visionary leadership of this community-engagement platform as well as the university itself. Still, somewhat paradoxically, she warned readers in this same book that while "vision trumps everything," it must be "derived at the hands of many."

> Institutions can be inclusive of the various interests and constituencies on the campus and in the community, and still align these diverse interests in a coherent vision of the future (p. 224).

Bowen (2011) made a comparable point about the development of vision and strategy and its translation into operations in shared-governance environments:

> Things generally get done through a combination of extensive consultation, much persuasion, carefully constructed incentives, and some sanctions – rarely by straightforward 'commands,' though of course presidents and others with executive authority must make decisions and take responsibility for them (p. 5).

Interestingly, however, Trachtenberg et al. (2013) do not even mention vision as a subject matter, let alone presidents' roles in the vision-development process, among their six primary themes explaining "derailed presidencies." These include ethical lapses, poor interpersonal skills, inability to lead key constituencies, difficulty adapting, failure to meet objectives and board of trustee shortcomings. It is possible that effective presidential visions and/or roles in vision development contribute to success, but are not to be found as the major criteria of failure.

Vision Development

Vision Communication

Simon (1947) was among the first to stress the role of leader as vision-communicator when he asserted that effective, vision-based communication from leaders is "absolutely essential to organizations" (p. 208). In more recent decades, Baum et al.

(1998) and Smythe (2007) argued there are direct links between a leader's engagement in the internal communication of strategic, vision-based messages and actual employee understanding and use of those messages. Argenti at al. (2005) asserted that leaders have a "strategic communication imperative" (p. 83) and suggested that visionary, strategic communication ranks among the most important jobs of any organizational leader.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) underscored the extraordinary amounts of time and money organizations invest in developing and communicating vision. They emphasized the importance of leader engagement in the communication of vision and in modeling the behaviors that help advance that vision within the organization as part of that communication, but they say little about the leader role in actually helping to develop that vision.

Smythe (2007) argued that there are direct links between a leader's engagement in the internal communication of strategic, vision-based messages and actual employee understanding and use of those messages. Argenti at al. (2005) asserted that leaders have a "strategic communication imperative" (p. 83) and suggested that visionary, strategic communication ranks among the most important jobs of any leader. Focusing at the level of vision and strategy, Hamm (2006) maintained that "effective communication is a leader's most critical tool for doing the essential job of leadership" (p. 114).

Kanungo (2001) and Percy et al. (2006) emphasized the importance of vision and strategic communication in shaping employee meaning and achieving and sustaining organizational transformation. Consistently, however, the emphasis in the literature is on vision communication in this context and not on the leader role in developing vision or even on leader communication during such vision development.

Bennis and Nanus (1985) cited the management of communication as one of five characteristics of outstanding transformational leaders working in concert with what the

authors describe as management of attention, for example, focusing stakeholder's (employees, customers, suppliers, etc.) attention on a vision and strategic direction.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) built on that work in more specific terms by citing the need to inspire a shared vision among their five Leadership Practices Inventory scales. Conger and Kanungo (1994) said that articulating vision serves among six follower-oriented dimensions of successful leadership practice.

Again, there is precious little in the general literature about actually developing vision – how it's done – or about the leader role in the process. What there is in the literature about vision development and communication is biased toward the latter subject area, which is only marginally useful to understanding the leader role in vision development.

Vision Development in Colleges and Universities

There is some limited research and scholarly insight in the higher education literature on the subject of vision development. Three major themes concerning the specific relationships between the college presidency and vision development emerge here. The first touches upon strategic planning and the role of vision-development in that process. The second theme references the increasingly challenging governance issues and structures discussed above in general terms, which can find presidents at odds with major stakeholders such as tenured faculty, senior staff and donors as well as with the objectives, history and fundamental mission and values of the institution as perceived by these powerful constituents. The third theme concerns the specific argument for inclusion of these key constituents in vision-development and related strategic-planning processes. Some of these themes intersect with and otherwise augment discussions above, however,

this section of the literature review makes some very different points and offers varied perspectives from earlier discussions.

Strategic Planning and Institutional Vision

Scholars and practitioners generally agree that vision development most often occurs as part of institutions' strategic-planning processes (Mintzberg, 1994; Duderstadt, 2000; Bolman & Gallos, 2001; Martin, 2014). They also assert that effective strategy is a central determinant of the success of any institutional vision. Bolman and Gallos (2011), for example, wrote that, "Without focus, strategic direction, and a politically viable plan, a vision remains an illusion (p. 78).

However, and despite such prevalent views, strategic planning in organizations and especially within higher education has a difficult history. Countering today's majority opinion on the utility of well-executed strategic planning, and still reflecting the views of those in higher education who resist what are seen as management practices borrowed from business, Birnbaum (2000) lumped strategic planning in with zero-based budgeting, total quality management and other management "fads" about which higher education officials should be leery.

This skepticism about strategic planning is nothing new in general management circles, either. Mintzberg's (1994) groundbreaking book on "The rise and fall of strategic planning" made the case that managers overestimate their abilities to predict the future and, therefore, they risk creating plans and forecasts that are illusions of precise, technocratic strategy. Mintzberg drew a distinction between this kind of deliberate though limited strategy and what he referred to as emergent strategy. Similar to themes found in complexity leadership, emergent strategy is not based on original strategic intention.

Rather, it emerges from an organization's responses to unanticipated events and opportunities (Martin, 2014). This relationship between deliberate and emergent strategic-planning orientations raises interesting questions for college and university presidents engaged in vision development. For example, how flexible should their visions and strategies be in order to capitalize on emergent events and then, by extension, how flexible is too flexible?

Martin (2014) said that strategic plans have three basic components, reflecting a consensus albeit generalized view of the major components of most strategic plans: 1) vision and mission that set out relatively lofty aspirations, 2) lists of initiatives for achieving those aspirations that are constrained only by affordability and 3) the conversion of these initiatives into pro-forma financial statements. He maintained that lengthy lists of initiatives not filtered by prioritization, integration or tough-minded market analyses fall short of real and effective strategy.

However, Martin referred to this process as the "big lie of strategic planning." Echoing Mintzberg, he asserted the misguided role of strategic planning in giving leaders false "comfort" in a turbulent, often-unpredictable world. In arguing to separate the word "strategic" from the word "planning," Martin said that, "Mistaking planning for strategy is a common trap" and, as a result, that "strategic plans all tend to look the same" (p. 80). Martin maintained that planning is useful, but limited:

> Management typically commits only to year one; in the context of years two through five, 'strategic' actually means 'impressionistic.' This exercise arguably makes for more thoughtful and thorough budgets. However, it must not be confused with strategy. Planning typically isn't explicit about what the organization chooses not to do and why. It does not question assumptions. And its dominant logic is affordability; the plan consists of whichever initiatives fit the (institution's) resources (p. 80).

Resneck Pierce (2012) borrowed from the lexicon of strategic planning in arguing that a college or university's vision, "Must also address the institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats" (SWOT analysis) if it is to be credible and viable (p. 63). Here, she links if not conflates vision processes and outcomes with tactical strategic-planning tools such as SWOT analyses. She punctuates her vision-strategy link by adding that, "The best (strategic) plans grow out of a transparent, thoughtful, and inclusive process that is grounded in budgetary realities – that is, good data" (p. 63).

Duderstadt (2000) said that strategic planning is "deciding what should be done, that is, choosing objectives" and that, "Development of a vision is important to the strategic process" (p. 265). He detailed his own vision-development and strategic-planning efforts as president of the University of Michigan in the 1990s:

> We began with a classic approach to planning, by developing a campuswide process to arrive at a mission statement and a vision statement. This was challenging since the university's mission was so complex, varied and evolving. ….. The visioning process involved a great many groups, including faculty members, staff, students and alumni (p. 274).

Despite the reportedly straightforward nature of his visioning and strategic-planning exercise, Duderstadt wrote that there is actually very little straightforward about strategic planning at institutions of higher education:

> Strategic planning in higher education has had mixed success, particularly in institutions of the size, breadth and complexity of the research university. Even the word 'strategic' sends shivers up the spine of some faculty members and triggers vitriolic attacks against bureaucratic planners (p. 262).

Duderstadt regretted that, in the context of this dim view of strategic planning on campus, "Institutions all too often choose a timid course of incremental, reactive change

because they view a more strategically driven transformation process as too risky" (p. 264).

Countering such safe, bureaucratic instincts, however, Trachtenberg (2008) implored boards of trustees, presidents and those engaged in strategic planning on campus with the view that, "You can't drive an institution without a leap of faith – sort of what like you have in religions. In other words, you have to believe in the unproven" (p. 43). This tension between the boldness and relative safety of vision and the visionary intent of strategic plans is a key consideration in this work.

Governance, Vision and Fundraising

Kilpatrick and Silverman (2005) considered the governance issue from the perspective of one especially powerful stakeholder group, donors. The authors raised concerns about the adequacy of vision statements for non-profit organizations in general, and they questioned whether and how actual and potential financial contributors shape the development or interpretation of an institutional vision. This is a critical aspect of college and university governance since, for example, every institution involved in this study is organized as a non-profit entity.

By contrast, the authors underscored the value of profits and losses in guiding a for-profit business in the development and implementation of institutional vision. Without a firm rudder of specific, measurable market performance, however, Kilpatrick and Silverman contend that non-profits (including most colleges and universities) and their leaders may be subject to the whims of shifting or alternative visions and strategic directions based on satisfying the special interests of funders. This is not a small point as it relates to a president's ability and willingness to develop institutional vision that is

focused and prioritized and that, as a result, may preclude some funding possibilities and risk alienating some funders.

Nicholson (2007), Nelson (2007) and others also underscored the vast and ever-increasing amount of time and energy college and university presidents invest in raising money and being responsive to donors today, potentially crowding out other commitments such as the effective development, communication and implementation of institutional vision. Nicholson (2007) cited Cook (1997) in making the point that, "the role as fundraiser has become the most important one for university and college presidents" (p. 256).

> More and more, the success of a university or a college depends on the president's ability to successfully integrate an effective leadership style with his/her fundraising activities (p. 256).

In arguing that the "quest for gifts does not have to silence the presidential voice" (p. 31), Nelson nonetheless points to "major dangers" that constrain the presidential voice. Not surprisingly, one of these dangers is "the relentless fundraising pressure on presidents – the era now of the almost continuous campaign – and the fear of losing major donors, especially in reaction to hot-button issues. The fleeting nature of fundraising, a business in which timing can be everything, can make presidents reticent about what they say" (p. 31).

Governance and Inclusion: Case Studies at Three Universities

With the delicate issues of shared-governance in mind, and in modeling what they deem to be a successful, highly communicative and participatory visioning and strategic planning process at Cleveland State University in 2005, Kogler et al. (2009) argued that presidents and their executive teams should undertake vision development and strategic planning inclusively:

> Take it easy. It is critical to spend as much time as necessary to get everyone on board ….. Although it took almost two years to accomplish this, it was ultimately worth it since the process was perceived as having originated "from the bottom up." Furthermore, the planning process included mechanisms for getting input and feedback from a wide variety of constituents, beginning at the operational level. While this input-seeking took a great deal of time and energy, it also led to the level of buy-in we needed to be successful (p. 23).

In researching Philadelphia University's 2007 approach to vision development and strategic planning, Antheil and Spinneli (2011) similarly commended the new president there for ensuring careful inclusivity and a bolder, more ambitious vision statement. "Faculty and staff alike felt that the president allowed the plan to emerge organically from the work of many committees and subcommittees with strong faculty leadership……..The president posed questions along the way to encourage a grander, less detailed vision" (p. 24).

In contrast, however, Aleong and Aleong (2011) suggested that Howard University's 2001 strategic planning and visioning process was inadequate in terms of inclusion of key stakeholders:

> A major problem was the lack of involvement of players in a fervent and zealous manner……Howard named their famous alumni but did not discuss grassroots planning and synchronization required to make their plan a success by naming committees or incorporating their stakeholders into the process (p. 23).

Going back further in history, former Duke University President Nannerl Keohane (1985) emphasized that effective governance meant that presidents must regard others in the institution "as genuine colleagues in a common enterprise, as co-laborers in the same vineyard, to accomplish common goals" (p. 37). She added, "Making things happen means building coalitions, forming alliances, compromising in order to get further, and

working with other people whose purposes converge with yours in order to reach some common goals" (pp. 35-36).

In this spirit, Guadiani (1996) offered that the willingness to listen is among the greatest leadership attributes a president can bring to vision development or any task. Indeed, McLaughlin's (1996, 2004, 2006) scholarship suggests that she considers listening to be the single most important success factor defining effective leadership and governance. In general, the literature leaves little doubt as to how critical it is for presidents to understand and respect the unique role of governance in higher education and, as a result, the need to include all key stakeholders in vision development.

In the same vein as this theme of respect and inclusion, former University of Michigan President James Duderstadt (2007) underscored the need for presidents – especially new ones – to discover, respect and build on an institution's history, traditions and values during the development of vision as well as in the execution of that vision.

Ultimately, however, Nelson cautioned (2007) that too much can be made of the need for presidential visioning in the first place. Writing in the same year as Duderstadt, he supported his contentions but insisted that:

> The lure to focus heavily on the 'vision thing' is dangerous because it is not simply or even primarily the most important personal asset of the president. College presidents certainly cannot lack vision, but in the context of the academy, their vision is and must be joined in a seamless and symbiotic way to the basic foundations of the university. The values, beliefs, and principles of that foundation constitute the core vision for the academy and for the presidents who lead it (p. 30).

He added that presidents in vision development should "then, and only then, contribute personal vision and aspiration to form an imprint they can hope to leave behind" (p. 31).

Institutional Vision

The scholarly literature covers considerable ground in attempting to define and characterize institutional vision, with many diverse, competing and sometimes contradictory views.

Institutional Vision Definition

Kantabutra (2010) made this point in noting the absence of any consensus definition for vision, which certainly complicates study of the subject. "Despite its apparent importance, vision definition is still not generally agreed on, which is an important issue because empirical research on vision may be affected by the various ways in which vision has been defined" (p. 377). Having said this, Kantabutra (2008) had in earlier work, at minimum, suggested that effective visions have seven traits of 1) brevity, 2) clarity, 3) challenge, 4) abstractness, 5) stability, 6) future orientation, and 7) desirability or ability to inspire. It has to be stated, as well, that there is a noteworthy paucity of contemporary definitions and characterizations of vision in the literatures compared to efforts in the 1980s and '90s – other than Kantabutra's scholarship.

Kouzes and Posner (2002) asserted that an institutional vision is an ideal and unique image of the future. In considering the question of vision, Peters and Waterman (1987) suggested that vision needs to create in leaders and followers a clear bias for action. Indeed, this dissertation embraces a definition of vision that couples the Kouzes and Posner ideal with the more practical concern about action originally raised by Peters and Waterman.

It would seem that both a vivid image of a future state that is perceived to be better than the current orientation, coupled with the view that actions must compel an organization toward realizing that future state, are needed to provide a well-rounded definition of vision. Visions otherwise risk becoming, in the words of Senge et al. (2004), "good ideas that unleash no energy for change" (p. 131). Indeed, Senge (1991) argued that effective visions emphasize positive, future-directed qualities around change and growth aspirations.

As such, institutional vision is defined in this study as *an ideal and unique image of an institution's future that creates a bias for specific action designed to realize that future.* This definition underscores that effective institutional visions are future oriented, singular to the organization, sufficiently ambitious, realistically obtainable, action-producing and shared throughout the organization.

Deconstructing Institutional Vision

Scholars have been laboring over the definition and characteristic of institutional vision for several decades now. Kilpatrick and Silverman (2005) stated that vision is a set of aspirations its (an organization's) leaders hope to achieve in the next three to five years. Nanus (1992) wrote that vision is a mental construct that we have within our power to transform into reality. Naylor and Willimon (1997) argued that the sharing of vision is its single most important component, answering the question, what does the community want to be?

Bennis and Nanus (1985) defined vision as the projected mental images of what the leader wants to achieve. Collins and Porras (1996) believed vision is what we aspire to become, to achieve, to create – something that will require significant change and

progress to attain. (p. 66) Senge et al. (2004) believed that vision is an image of what we're trying to create. (p. 140) Baum et al. (1998) said vision is relative, as each leaders sees it. Mumford and Strange (2005) portrayed vision as a mental model for understanding internal operations and informing one's actions accordingly.

Locke (1991) contended that effective institutional visions are inspiring, abstract, brief, stable and motivating. Sims and Lorenzi (1992) wrote that high-quality visions are inspirational and, importantly, integrated with the visions of others. As such, and in support of the Cleveland State, University of Philadelphia and Howard University vision- and strategy-development processes referenced above, they place a premium on inclusiveness in vision development. Baum et al. (1998) argued that quality content within the vision is core to its success and central to organizational performance.

Collins and Porras (1996) suggested that vision is a combination of core ideology and envisioned future. They offered that, "Truly great companies understand the difference between what should never change and what should be open for change" (p. 66). The authors indicated that the values and purpose of core ideology are immutable, shaping the enduring character of an organization and providing a consistent identity.

Collins and Porras said that the envisioned future has two components – BHAGs or Big Hairy Audacious Goals – and vivid description. In their terms, the envisioned future is dynamic and subject to change. The authors said that what is meant by goal in this context is a "huge, daunting challenge" (p. 73). Collins and Porras believed that vivid description is essential to effective visions, too, as the "vibrant, engaging, and specific description of what it will be like to achieve the BHAG. Think of it as translating the vision from words into pictures, of creating an image that people can carry around in their

heads" (p. 74). The authors say that Henry Ford's statements supporting mass production of the automobile provide a good example of straightforward, vivid description:

> I will build a motor car for the great multitude…..it will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one…..the horse will have disappeared from our highways, the automobile will be taken for granted (p. 74).

President Kennedy's 1962 Houston speech calling for the United States to place a man of the moon and return him safely within that decade is said to be another example of straightforward, vivid description at work. Both Henry Ford and John Kennedy's visions certainly do meet the Collins and Porras (1996) outsized BHAG criteria.

Vision and the Leader

Goleman et al. (2002) turned the vision conversation inward to the leaders themselves, suggesting that developing great vision requires:

> emotionally intelligent leaders to look inside – at what they feel, think, and sense about their organizations. They act as highly sensitive instruments to connect with the company's ideal vision and mission, and they notice the gaps between what could be and what is" (p. 205).

Goleman et al. believed leaders who engage in an assessment of their passions and dreams and those of their colleagues "can begin to identify aspects of an organization's culture, of its overarching mission and vision" (p. 206). Goleman et al. focused the conversation more specifically around leaders using their own passions, experiences and motivations to engage in visioning.

Lucas (1998) had previously stressed the importance of leaders undertaking vision development well because, "Without a clearly defined vision, we flounder, we react to our environment and mimic competitors. With high-concept but hokey vision, we end up in the same soup but with a dash of cynicism" (p. 23). Kouzes and Posner (2002) pointed

out the damage that employee cynicism at the hands of deficient vision statements can do to a leader and an organization. The authors believed that leader "credibility is mostly about consistency between words and deeds" (p. 47) and that "gains for the cynics" (p. 33) occur when leaders lack clarity, unity, and intensity among "visions, aims, and aspirations" (p. 48). Against this problematic backdrop, a 2003 Towers and Perrin study cited by Beslin and Reddin (2004) stated that organizational communications about vision, mission, values, strategy, performance and competitive challenges are "viewed as credible by less than half of employees, and appear dishonest to roughly a quarter of the workforce" (p. G1).

Numerous scholars (Kantabutra, 2010; Bass, 1990; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989) underscored that despite many opinions about institutional vision, no theory explains how visions actually shape organizational performance. Again, this is why there appears in the literature and in best-selling books many common-sense claims that vision matters to organizational success, but scant evidence supporting these views or actually suggesting how to develop effective vision – effectively. Kantabutra (2010) labeled this "a serious missing area of the prevailing vision-based leadership theories" (p. 378). His work has been focused in the higher education context, too.

In terms of examining vision through the lens of a leader, several scholars or practitioners laud the visionary leadership of Arizona State University President Michael Crow as well as his reportedly effective techniques at vision and strategy development. For example, Bolman and Gallos (2011) emphasized the importance of using history as Crow did to "build on the past for an exciting, new vision of the future:"

> Crow could have chosen to ignore or downplay ASU's history as a young institution founded as a teachers' college with Research1

> status only since the 1990s. He chose instead to wear that history as a badge of honor central to ASU's mission. 'We hold that to be at our core. We are teachers first, teachers always and teachers last' (p. 117).

However, echoing earlier, dire claims about the decline if not demise of colleges and universities, Crow has characterized the state of U.S. higher education as, "Too few students are going to college, not enough are graduating, and the whole thing costs too much" – as a "piss-poor performance" (Selingo, 2013, p. xi).

Case studies such as President Crow at ASU aside, it is conjectured here that the mediocrity of much visioning work today – a point of view reinforced by Senge et al. (2004) in writing that "most visions that management teams come up with are superficial" (p. 131) – might owe in part to leaders being unwilling to open up and engage in such honest, introspective, emotionally charged and time-consuming vision-development conversations with fairness and respect as envisioned by Goleman. Perhaps this is one reason why there exists a gap between the scholars who suggest that vision matters and practitioners whose actions may suggest otherwise.

Zimpher (in Percy et al., 2006), however, maintained that institutional visions matter greatly. She argued emphatically that, "The vision thing is key to an institution's future. Wading into the conversation about whose vision is it, that of the president or the community she or he represents, Zimpher added:

> Establishing institutional vision is a process, not a single act. At all costs, the president should avoid answering the question, 'What is your vision for the university?" without the imprimatur of the larger academic community. ….. The presidential role in creating vision is one of guide and moderator, best established by some framework for participation that helps lead a group of key institutional constituents through the visioning and planning process (p. 234).

Vision Statements

Pearson (1989) and others argued that vision statements that are well done must specifically address the environment and realistic competitive position of the organization and cannot be superficial and generic. Hamel and Prahalad (2005) made a comparable point in advancing their notion of strategic intent. They argued that an organization must reconcile its purpose with its means, producing vision statements that balance ambition and realism. The implication here is that vision statements fail because they are not ambitious enough or, conversely, too ambitious in light of the practical capacity to achieve them. The authors suggested that thinking in these terms "implies a sizeable stretch for an organization" (p. 6), but that doing so is central to developing and ultimately realizing meaningful vision statements.

The authors subsequently wrote that strategic intent could be thought of as a heart driven by some measure of emotion and yet integrated with a mind rooted in realism. They said that a sense of direction, sense of discovery and sense of destiny can be used to portray a differentiated, competitively unique and inherently valuable vision statement of the future (Hamel & Prahalad, 1996).

Coming from a different, more humanistic perspective than Hamel and Prahalad, and yet reinforcing the evocative use of vivid description discussed by Collins and Porras (1996), Senge et al. (2004) spoke similarly to visions and vision statements with the emotional power of "crystallizing intent" (p. 133). "Crystallizing intent requires being open to the larger intention and imaginatively translating the intuitions that arise into concrete images and visions that guide action" (p. 133). Still, for all their belief in the emotional, animating power of vision, Senge et al. seemed to lament the state of vision,

vision statements and visioning these days. “As the idea of vision has become popularized in recent years, its essential meaning has often been lost. Visions are not lofty sentiments or inspiring phrases; they’re practical tools” (p. 140).

Chapter Two Summary

This research considers relationships between two constructs – leadership and institutional vision. The higher education context for this work then produces two primary variables under consideration – college and university leadership and college and university institutional vision development.

This review drew largely from the leadership and higher education literatures and covers five domains: 1) leadership, 2) college and university leadership, 3) institutional vision and vision statements, 4) college and university institutional vision, and 5) institutional vision development and communication.

Five broad conclusions emerge from the Literature Review:

1. The leadership and higher education literatures reference the leader role in vision development sparingly. Scholars certainly contend that institutional vision and leaders with vision are important, but the conversation has not explained why or proven the point empirically. Nor has it produced a standard definition for vision. Kantabutra (2010) made this point noting that, “Despite its apparent importance, vision definition is still not generally agreed on, which is an important issue because empirical research on vision may be affected by the various ways in which vision has been defined” (p. 377). He also underscored the nascent stage of research into this issue in higher education, particularly, noting that, “Empirically, no published studies have

linked vision components specifically to educational institution performance, which is critical since vision has been emphasized as key to performance throughout the educational leadership literature" (p. 376).

2. Until Burns' (1978) work on Transformational Leadership, most leadership theories were silent on the matter of vision and the role leaders play in crafting it. Burns opened the door to the vision conversation and those who followed his scholarly lead increasingly pointed to the importance of leader roles (especially in vision communication) to organizational success. For example, Sashkin's (1995) meta-analyses of various Transformational Leadership theories found three common personal competencies and three common behavioral competencies, with visionary qualities prominent within the former and articulating clear vision key to the latter. Baum et al. (1998) echoed Sashkin in finding that two of the three common characteristics shared by many key leadership theories concern vision. The authors contend that both "communicating a vision" and "taking various actions intended to implement the vision" (p. 2) are paramount to transformational leadership.
3. The key theories that built upon Transformational thinking, such as Servant Leadership and Complexity Leadership, shared and distributed responsibility for leadership throughout the organization. As a first consideration, the decentralizing qualities of some of these theories seemed to dissipate the role of vision and the leader's actions in developing it. This is especially true with Servant Leadership approaches in the 1980s. As leadership theory embraced Complexity, however, vision and the leader role in vision development

regained the prominence it held in the Transformational Leadership framework, chiefly because scholars understood that a widely shared core vision was essential in keeping together an organization operating in complexity or even at the edge of chaos.

4. The higher education literature reflects a college presidency that has become vastly more complex in recent years, with what some say are enormous and often unrealistic burdens placed on presidents and with seemingly unlimited demands made on their time (Greenberg, 1998; Dennison, 2001; McLaughlin, 2004; Chait et al., 2004; Duderstadt, 2007; Bruininks, 2010; Kantabutra, 2010), especially around fundraising expectations (Nicholson, 2007; Nelson 2007). The realities of today's college presidency raise questions about the ability and willingness of institutional leaders to engage in visioning, especially in light of complicated shared-governance issues and amidst such epochal changes in higher education over questions of accessibility and affordability. Interestingly, however, Bruininks et al. (2010) and others contended that such complexity made ever-more abundant by the Great Recession of 2008-2010 – and the existential questions it raises about the viability of some colleges and universities – places an even greater premium on presidents who can develop animating, differentiating vision for their institutions.
5. The higher education literature does speak specifically to the leader role in vision development in at least one way, stressing the importance of inclusivity in the process. Case studies of vision and strategy development at Cleveland

State University, Howard University and Philadelphia University stress the need to include all key stakeholders in the process. In this context, Guadiani (1996) offered that the willingness to listen to key stakeholders – as a manifestation of respect for and inclusion of key stakeholders – is among the greatest leadership attributes a president can bring to vision development.

Chapter Three: Methods

This research is exploratory by nature. Exploratory research generally requires a qualitative approach to phenomena (Denscombe, 2003; Hair Jr. et al., 2003). Creswell (2007) argued that qualitative approaches are best suited to research problems where a topic needs to be broadly explored and theories are not generally available. This is a reasonable description of the current understanding of vision development by college and university presidents.

Among Creswell's other criteria for choosing qualitative approaches, all of which apply in this study, are that the:

- Inquiry starts with the how and not the why of the phenomenon under investigation.
- Researcher presents a highly detailed view of the subject.
- Participants in the study be engaged in their natural setting, and
- Researcher serves as an "active learner" who can compose and communicate a story from the participants' points of view.

In advancing what they call naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the use of qualitative approaches for dealing with multiple realities and because, as is essential in this study, they are "more sensitive to and adaptable to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered" (p. 40). This is particularly desirable in interviewing college and university presidents with divergent opinions, histories, tenures, values and contexts, and since the researcher works with college presidents and frequently interacts with them.

As with Creswell, Lincoln and Guba also placed logical dependence on the use of the natural setting, in the offices and work environments of college and university presidents in this case. Here is where "realities are whole that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts" and where "research interactions should take place with the entity-in-residence for fullest understanding" (p. 39).

Specifically, this study is exploratory in nature because of the limited existing research on the role of college and university presidents in vision development. Beall (2002) said exploratory research "can be defined as potentially useful knowledge-building in a new or lonely area (p. 26). Beall's call to "explore in lonely areas" is inspiring, and research on vision development by college and university presidents seems pretty lonely – thus far. Beall added that:

> The very term 'exploratory research' implies extending studies into uncharted ground or initiating research in novel areas, but it is surprising how seldom this actually occurs. More typical is the desire to follow accepted paths where others have trodden and work in popular areas (p. 27).

It is expected that the exploratory perspectives of college and university presidents gained in this study will help identify, clarify and organize the primary issues associated with vision development. Furthermore, it is hoped that this discovery will lead to construction of a future model or even theory for thinking about and organizing the vision-development process on campus and the presidential role in it.

Research Assumptions

Researchers inevitably undertake investigations with varied philosophical and theoretical frameworks and biases. Given the role that an investigator's philosophical

assumptions can play in qualitative research design, implementation, analysis and reporting, it is essential that both the researcher and reader understand the potential impact of these assumptions on a study (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1988; Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) identifies five philosophical assumptions that shape a qualitative researcher's beliefs and potential biases as well as her choice of specific method. These five assumptions below (p. 75) align well with this researcher's views as well as the exploratory nature of the four research questions in this study:

1. Ontology considers the nature of reality. In this context, reality is characterized as being subjective and multiple – expressed in the opinions and feelings of the presidents in this study – and indicates the use of quotes drawn directly from the words of these higher education leaders.
2. Epistemology considers the relationship between the researcher and the research. In this case, by design, the distance between researcher and research participants is relatively close. With this proximity, the researcher interviewed presidents in their offices (with one exception) and closely listened to and otherwise observed them in their natural institutional setting. Indeed, Lincoln and Guba (1985) underscored the value of observation in such naturalistic inquiry, stating that observation provides the "here and now experience in depth" (p. 273). Given the nature of this inquiry, asking presidents what they think and how they feel about developing institutional vision, non-verbal cues provided an important, supplemental form of feedback. These cues take the form of conscious gestures as well as

unconscious body language (p. 276) and the researcher made note of them to separate potential, apparent discrepancies between, for example, a president's stated declaration that vision or his or her role in its development is important from gestures or body language that could suggest something different.

3. Axiology considers the role of values in the research. It accepts that the researcher, research participants and the nature of institutional vision itself are all values-laden and subject to inherent biases.
4. Rhetoric accounts for the use of language in the research. It accepts that the researcher creates a narrative in order to tell the stories of how college and university presidents develop institutional vision and produces meaningful findings from a discerning analysis of those stories.
5. Methodological considers the research process. The researcher works inductively in this case, delving into details emerging from interviews before attempting to develop overarching findings. This borrows from Creswell's (2007) contention that "human experience makes sense to those who live it, prior to all interpretations and theorizing" (p. 86).

These philosophical assumptions align well with both the researcher's worldview and the nature of the subject being investigated in this inquiry. In Lincoln and Guba's (1985) terms, this researcher worked from a naturalistic paradigm where, as reflected in Creswell's five-part typology above: 1) realities are multiple and constructed, 2) the knower and known are interactive and inseparable, 3) generalizations are time and context bound and not necessarily universal, 4) all entities such as the researcher and

research participants are in a constant state of shaping one another, and 5) and the inquiry is values bound.

In terms of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) landmark sociological paradigms, the researcher undertook this work as an interpretivist in seeking to understand and explain the essence of an issue from individuals' perspectives. Creswell, Lincoln and Guba, and Burrell and Morgan all underscored the departure from traditional positivist schools of inquiry, embracing both a relativist ontology in which reality is constructed intersubjectively as well as a subjectivist epistemology in which we cannot separate ourselves from our knowledge and experiences or how we relate to research participants.

Research Questions

The following four exploratory research questions were used to investigate vision development by college and university presidents. They served as the basis of the interview guide utilized for this study. They emerged logically from the Problem Statement and Purpose Statement in Chapter One as augmented by the Literature Review in Chapter Two:

1. How do presidents organize and prepare for their vision-development processes?
2. What roles do presidents ascribe to themselves in developing institutional vision?
3. What are the primary success factors that shape successful presidential roles in developing institutional vision?

4. Do presidents believe their institution's vision should reflect their vision, a broader, inclusive vision incorporating opinions from many of the institution's stakeholders, or a hybrid of these elements?

Population and Sample

This research drew from a population of current U.S. college and university presidents. There are approximately 4,600 degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States, according to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (2011). Of that number, nearly 2,900 of them are four-year, degree-granting public and private institutions that are not structured as for-profit businesses. This study drew from this latter pool.

The research participants were identified for this study using purposeful sampling techniques (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Boyatzis, 1998). The researcher chose subjects among the population of U.S. college and university presidents who had undertaken a visioning or a vision-based strategic-planning initiative, but who could also present a useful variety of perspectives on the subject. This is an approach to purposeful sampling that Patton (1990) called maximum variation sampling, which seeks to identify and interpret unique variations that emerge from different subjects, contexts and conditions.

Presidents in the sample varied in age and stage of career, gender and type of institutions led. Efforts were made to include leaders of both private and public institutions, for example, as well as male and female presidents and research participants in age ranges from their 40s and 50s to their 60s and even early 70s.

To sharpen and delimit the study, however, five additional criteria were used in this purposeful sample selection:

1. Transformational Experience: Each research participant arguably led (or is currently leading) an institutional turnaround. Such transformations are marked by criteria such as consistent improvements in enrollment and/or annual core revenue growth. It was believed that successful transformations undertaken by presidents and their staffs can serve as a useful benchmark for identifying best practices in vision development.
2. Institutional Type: Presidents of colleges and universities were included in this research. Their organizations were of any size, located in urban, suburban and rural settings, and either public or private, but they were all four-year institutions granting both undergraduate and graduate degrees. The sample did not seek representativeness on the basis of geography (Eastern, Midwestern, Southern and Western United States locations). This is not deemed necessary to answer the research questions or lend understanding to the subject matter being explored. However, some variation of the size (small, medium-sized and large organizations) and governance (public and private institutions) of the institutions was present. Presidents of two-year community colleges were not included in this study. The missions, mandates and operating contexts of community colleges are just too different from four-year (undergraduate and graduate) degree-granting institutions to provide useful comparisons and contexts.
3. Specific Experience: The subjects undertook a visioning and related strategic-planning exercise at their institutions as president.

4. Timeframe: The subjects led these visioning and related strategic-planning processes within the last seven years.
5. Geography and Dominant Orientations: All subjects led the visioning processes at institutions located in the United States. These institutions had religious heritages in two cases – a Jesuit university and Lutheran college. For the purpose of this study, however, institutions did not have more narrow or dominant religious or social affiliations that could otherwise have risked skewing an understanding of the visioning process and outcomes. Religiously affiliated institutions with broad liberal arts curricula and professional graduate schools such as the Jesuit university were included in the sample, but not seminaries or Bible schools. Finally, for-profit institutions such as the University of Phoenix and Capella University were also excluded from this research. It is arguably difficult at this stage of evolution in the understanding of vision development in higher education to assess how strong profit motives and largely online-delivery systems could otherwise skew understanding of the phenomenon, let alone its transferability to the vast majority of not-for-profit colleges and universities.

Some background and demographic details about the research participants are provided in Chapter Four, which helps contextualize their input and the findings it engendered.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through the administration of in-depth, open-ended interviews conducted by the researcher using a pre-established interview guide. A total of 10 open-ended, in-depth interviews was completed between October and December 2013, all of which were done on a face-to-face basis in each president's office with one exception. That exception was in the case of one president who cancelled the in-office interview and rescheduled it for a hotel conference room closer to the researcher two weeks later.

Initial Subject Contact and Informed Consent

All the research participants were approached by e-mail to participate in the study. Some additional coordination by phone was also required to schedule the interviews. An Initial Contact Form (Appendix A) provided both an introduction of the researcher and the study as well as the necessary informed consent language. Informed consent is required for protecting the rights of participants and for ensuring voluntary participation in research. This document detailed the purpose of the study, its key components and the possible risks and benefits of participation. It also codified that participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Ultimately, on September 18, 2103, the Office of Human Research at The George Washington University formally exempted this research from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review.

The researcher worked with each of these presidents directly and/or through their administrative assistants to schedule the in-depth, open-ended interviews. The researcher also reviewed all vision statements, vision-related materials and strategic plans produced by these presidents and their institutions and meant for distribution to internal and external stakeholders.

Choice of Interview Approach

Qualitative interviewing is useful for eliciting detailed information and complex feelings from research subjects, enabling them to answer questions from their own frame of reference (Seidman, 2006). Open-ended interviews give researchers the opportunity to probe and delve deeper into points being made by participants. They also give subjects the flexibility to elaborate on their responses and add nuance to them. Open-ended interviews can boost the likelihood that useful thematic findings will emerge to help define a research area in formation, such as this one.

Patton (1990) said there are three types of open-ended interviews: 1) informal, 2) standardized and 3) the interview-guide approach. Standardized interviews are highly rigorous engagements in which the same questions are asked of subjects in the exact same order. On the other end of this spectrum, informal interviews are far less rigorous and approach the subject conversationally. Questions can vary as can the order in which they are presented to the research subjects. The trade-offs between the two approaches are that standardized interviews offer greater discipline while informal interviews benefit from greater spontaneity.

The interview-guide approach represents middle ground between formal standardization and broad informality. Here, the researcher develops a standardized list of issues to be covered in the interviews. Questions and the order of questions can vary, however, and the interviewer benefits from the flexibility of probing answers to questions in a follow-up, conversational manner. The researcher then framed, organized and matched questions and answers in the analytic coding phase of work with the objective to

be as responsive as possible to answering each of the four research questions posed for this study.

This dissertation utilized the interview-guide approach. However, Patton (1990) said that combination approaches may be best suited to answering specific research questions in some contexts. With this study, the researcher utilized an interview guide approach with semi-structured questions. These semi-structured questions were augmented, however, with a conversational approach and journalistic probing designed to maximize the flow of thoughts and feelings about vision development from the research participants.

The researcher determined the adequacy of the volume and quality of data collected from the interviews using Seidman's (2006) criteria for sufficiency and saturation. Accordingly, there will be a sufficient range of experiences and settings to give the hypothetical outside reader with little knowledge of this subject a firm sense of the issue and the specific findings emerging from the work. In doing so, the same or similar thoughts and feelings will be consistently expressed by the interviewees. Indeed, after six or seven of these in-depth interviews, the researcher was hearing the same or similar themes emerge repeatedly and consistently, indicating that a saturation point was approaching. The researcher concluded the process at 10 interviews.

Interview Guide Development

The interview guide (Appendix B) was developed from the four research questions that, in turn, emerged from the Literature Review and the researcher's background in the area under study. The guide and the direction of the probing were organized into five questions sets based on Patton's (1990) taxonomy. These question sets covered 1) subject

background information as well as their 2) experience, 3) knowledge, 4) opinions and 5) feelings about formal institutional vision development and their role in it. The interview guide was revised after the dissertation proposal defense, based on input from two college presidents serving in that capacity. It was subsequently informally tested with two research professionals with knowledge about interviewing guides and techniques.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher traveled to each president's office to conduct the interviews, with that one exception referenced above. Interviews lasted between 75 and 100 minutes. The researcher engaged in subsequent verification and member checks with a few presidents via e-mail.

Data was collected using an audio recording device as well as researcher field notes. In terms of data preservation and security, the researcher backed-up all data files on her personal computer, a separate hard-drive storage device and in the "cloud" using the Carbonite service

Trustworthiness

The researcher has some experience in vision development and strategic planning by college and university presidents. Every effort was made by the researcher to acknowledge this background and any potential biases that could have resulted from it. The goal was to achieve an appropriate level of objectivity to help ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) invoked Hegel who delineated three levels of consciousness concerning the relationships between objectivity and subjectivity: 1) a

primary level in which a person is “one-sidedly subjective” and at the “mercy of our feelings”, 2) a social level in which a person is “one-sidedly objective” and limited by “over control,” and 3) a realized level that is “objectively subjective” (p. 103). The researcher was highly intentional about the risk of investigator bias here but, in Lincoln and Guba’s words, “refused to go on suppressing our primary subjective experience” and found “ways of going down into it and rescuing material from it” (p. 103). She operated from the objectively-subjective framework.

The result here is that truth can be obtained by recognizing one’s subjectivity and incorporating it into the research process while striving for as much objectivity as possible to help ensure trustworthiness and dependability. Creswell (1998) called this “critical subjectivity” or a kind of heightened self-awareness that “enables the researcher to understand his or her psychological and emotional states before, during and after the research” (p. 196). Indeed, Stake (1995) indicated that research is not actually improved by making it appear value free. Nonetheless, the researcher here made considerable efforts to be as objective as possible during the interviews and in deriving the findings. She was especially cautious about offering strong opinions or posing leading comments to the research participants before or during the interviews.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered four criteria necessary for trustworthiness: 1) truth value, 2) applicability, 3) consistency, and 4) neutrality. The authors suggested at least four techniques for enhancing these criteria and, therein, establishing trustworthiness: 1) prolonged engagement, 2) persistent observation, 3) triangulation and 4) peer debriefing. Creswell added two other techniques of interest: 1) clarifying researcher bias and 2) thick, rich description.

Concerning Lincoln and Guba's techniques for ensuring trustworthiness, the researcher has been focused on the college presidency and this specific matter of vision and strategy development by presidents for six years now. When coupled with conducting in-depth interviews with 10 presidents while carefully observing these research participants, studying their vision statements, strategic plans and related source documents, and engaging in a deep reading of the literatures associated with vision and the leader role in vision development in higher education, she certainly met the prolonged-engagement and persistent-observation criteria.

The researcher also used triangulation and peer-debriefing techniques to help ensure trustworthiness. These included comparing and contrasting what the participants said in their interviews with their available vision statements, strategic plans and other documents, asking research participants at the conclusion of the interviews whether the questioning seemed fair and appropriate, reviewing audio recordings and field notes after each interview to calibrate interviewing effectiveness and potential for bias, working with a former university administrator with no connection to the presidents or their institutions to review the recordings as the interviews unfolded and discuss them with the researcher in order to check the researcher's thinking, interviewing effectiveness and risk of potential bias, and conferring with experts (e.g. an executive recruiter responsible for presidential placement) on specific issues raised by the research participants to ensure that the researcher was hearing and interpreting them fairly and dependably. Finally, the former university administrator and one other individual with extensive background in higher education each reviewed the draft findings and audio recordings and/or transcripts, discussed the preliminary results with the researcher and supported them.

Ultimately, of course, the research participants' own responses provide the best data-driven evidence for the interpretations in this study and a clear trail to assess the quality of the researcher's interviewing abilities, potential biases and actual findings.

Concerning Creswell's last two points above, the researcher specifically clarified researcher bias in this study and remained vigilant about it throughout the process. The research produced ample thick, rich description conveying the detailed thoughts and feeling of the subjects in their own words and, in doing so, demonstrably supported the findings that emerged from this study.

Data Analysis

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that a naturalistic, qualitative inquiry of this nature should "make sense of the data in ways that will, first, fit the continuing unfolding of the inquiry and, second, lead to maximal understanding of the phenomenon" (p. 225). Miles and Huberman (1994) and Seidman (2006) said there are three ways to analyze and interpret data to achieve this sense-making objective: 1) deductive, 2) inductive and 3) integrative.

This study generally utilized an inductive approach to the analysis, drawing on and building from the concepts and words provided by college and university presidents during the interviews in a bottom-up manner. Findings were developed by describing, interpreting and clustering the statements made by interviewees, which also enable readers to arrive at their own interpretations of the data (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed that inductive investigations are preferred to deductive ones because the process is more likely "to identify the multiple realities to be found in

the data;" "such analysis is more likely to make the investigator-respondent interaction explicit, recognizable, and accountable," and "this process is more likely to describe fully the setting and to make decisions about transferability to other settings easier' (p. 40).

With an inductive orientation as foundation, this study utilized Creswell's (1998) "data analysis spiral" (p. 142) to manage and analyze the data and to generate findings. Accordingly, the researcher moved in "analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach" to derive meaningful narrative. Data management comprises the first loop in the spiral. Here, the researcher maintained transcripts from interviews in hard copy format as well as in backed-up audio computer files. Once the data were organized correctly, the researcher read the transcripts in their entirety several times, taking notes and trying, as Creswell (1998) noted, to get a sense of the whole of the interviews "before breaking it into parts" (p. 143).

Content Analysis and Thematic Coding

The next part of Creswell's spiral is to reflect on the larger thoughts presented in the data and to create initial analytic categories. This is the "describing, classifying, and interpreting" (p. 144) phase of content analysis in which the researcher starts to organize the data into logical clusters, looking for "multiple forms of evidence to support each" chosen category (p. 144). "At this point in their analysis," Creswell states, "researchers step back and form larger meanings of what is going on" (p. 145). Finally, in this approach, the researcher represents the general themes emerging from the study.

The content analysis was structured by question. Data were organized thematically under each question. At the final stage of analysis, larger findings emerged from these

question-specific themes. Additional source documents were reviewed, as well, such as vision statements, strategic plans and brochures describing the vision and plans.

Boyatzis (1998) argued that "thematic analysis is a way of seeing," a three-part process in which "observation precedes understanding. Recognizing an important moment precedes encoding it, which in turn precedes interpretation" (p. 1). He further stated that a "good thematic code is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon" (p. 31). He observed that good codes have shared characteristics, three of which were applied here: 1) a label, 2) a definition and 3) a description of how to know when the theme occurs.

Transferability and Validity

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that transferability is, "in a strict sense, impossible" in naturalistic studies of this nature. Whether the findings in this case "hold in some other context, or even in the same context at some other time" is variable and subject to debate. The authors contend that:

> Thus the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick, rich description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (p. 316).

Lincoln and Guba did argue that a demonstration of trustworthiness and dependability of this kind of qualitative analysis and resultant findings is useful, as a proxy for transferability and external validity. In that spirit, the approaches to trustworthiness detailed earlier in this chapter can help make possible discussions of transferability and external validity credible but, as Lincoln and Guba advised, only the degree to which that is even possible in this context.

Subjectivity Statement

Reference has been made throughout this chapter to ensuring that the researcher effectively manages potential subjectivity risks. As referenced elsewhere in this study, the researcher does consult with leaders of colleges and universities on a regular basis. She occasionally engages with college presidents and their leadership teams in the development of their strategic plans. In the best sense of Creswell's (1998) "critical subjectivity" or Lincoln and Guba's state of being "objectively subjective," however, the researcher made every effort to account for these biases. She overcame such subjectivity risks by being honest about them, writing down several plausible subjectivity risks at the outset of the project, reviewing those risks periodically, and being fully conscious of them throughout the research.

Chapter Three Summary

This is a naturalistic inquiry of an exploratory nature. It seeks to answer four research questions focused on how college and university presidents develop institutional vision. It is designed to make sense of an issue that lacks much existing research.

The research population is comprised of current U.S. college and university presidents. These are leaders from approximately 2,900 four-year, degree-granting public and private institutions that are not structured as for-profit businesses in the United States. Purposeful sampling techniques were employed in choosing subjects who had completed a visioning or related strategic-planning process at an institution as president over the past seven years.

Data were gathered through the administration of in-depth, open-ended interviews conducted by the researcher using a standardized interview guide. Ten in-depth interviews were completed, all of which were done on a face-to-face basis.

The researcher determined the adequacy of the volume and quality of data collected from the interviews using Seidman's (2006) criteria for sufficiency and saturation. Accordingly, the researcher witnessed key themes being consistently repeated after six or seven of the in-depth sessions.

Data were collected using an audio-recording device as well as researcher field notes, and all computer and audio files were backed-up on a hard drive and with the Carbonite "cloud" service.

The study utilized an inductive approach to data analysis, building from the content provided by the presidents during the interviews. Findings were developed by describing, interpreting and clustering the statements made by interviewees, which will also enables readers to arrive at their own interpretations of the data. This study also utilized Creswell's (1998) "data analysis spiral" to manage, analyze and represent the data and to generate findings. These findings emerged from coded, thematic clusters developed in response to each of the four research questions. Overarching findings were then generated from an assessment of the relationships between and among the themes found within each question.

The researcher works with college presidents and has some experience in vision and strategy development undertaken by them. Every effort was made, therefore, to achieve an appropriate level of objectivity to help ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. This includes using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for establishing trustworthiness.

Chapter Four: Results

This chapter presents research analysis and results derived from substantive, in-depth interviews with 10 college and university presidents and, where applicable, a review of their vision statements and related strategic-planning publications. As previously discussed, vision development (and the overarching strategic-planning processes in which it is often contained) for each of the research participants occurred in the context of successful stewardship or even transformation of their institutions, be those changes marked by improvements in financial health and/or growth in enrollment.

The discussion starts by statistically calibrating the relative success of these presidents who, it is claimed here, are generally performing well and in many cases transforming their institutions – and contend they are doing so. This chapter also includes a brief demographic profile of the research participants and, as a secondary consideration, the institutions they lead (Table 2). This is followed by a detailed analysis of the results organized by key findings structured under each of the four research questions. This is an exploratory study, so many of these qualitative findings can subsequently serve as the basis for developing hypotheses about the presidential role in vision development for future testing using survey research and quantitative analyses. This chapter is guided by Wolcott's (1994) approach to presenting meaningful data, which lets the research participants speak for themselves – in their own words – and by staying as close as possible to the original data in answering the four research questions.

Calibrating Success

Some of the institutions in this study can be reasonably characterized as having been turned around. Others are arguably still within a transformative process under these current presidents. All of them seem to be performing well. Measurements of performance can be elusive, since many factors help or hinder an institution's success including external events over which presidents have little control, e.g., the Great Recession of 2008-2010. Still, growth in annual core revenue and combined student enrollments are reasonable proxies for success for those institutions in this study whose transformations are well underway. One important caveat to using overall enrollment growth data as a proxy for success, however, is that some transformed or transforming institutions such as Northeastern University (not represented in this study) actually reduced enrollments to improve student quality and reinvent themselves. Indeed, several institutions in this study show only modest growth in enrollments because they have been focused instead on boosting student quality, as reported by their presidents.

Table 1 depicts the growth in annual core revenue for each of the institutions represented both for the year before these presidents took office as well as in 2012 (last full year available). Annual core revenue is measured in millions of dollars and is defined by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) as the aggregation of tuition and fees, grants and contracts, gifts, investment returns and other. The table also lists fall enrollments for each institution, both for the year before these presidents took office as well as in 2012. Fall enrollment is defined as the total headcount of undergraduate and graduate students attending on both part-time and full-time bases as of September of the year. In both revenue and enrollment cases, the vast majority of these

institutions show growth – some of which is quite considerable. These data were acquired through IPEDS, which is maintained by the U.S. Department of Education.

Growth in *U.S. News & World Report* rankings is not used here as a success proxy because the merit of – as well as the methodologies used to compile – *USN&WR* rankings data have long been the subject of controversy and in many views do not accurately portray institutional success (Carey, 2006; Harvey, 2008). That said, the institutions represented in this study have generally experienced gains in *USN&WR* rankings over the tenures of these presidents. For example, one institution in this study grew from #90 on the *USN&WR* National Universities ranking in 2004, the year before that president took office, to #57 last year.

These performance data are directionally illustrative, but they can also be misleading for at least four reasons:

- First, some of the annual core revenue data include the effects of one-time financial events involving real estate transactions or investment holdings, for example, which can artificially increase or decrease the revenue number.
- Second, there is a growing body of work suggesting that core revenue and enrollment data are not the best metrics for calibrating institutional performance. For example, the Voluntary Institutional Metrics Project involving presidents of 18 institutions advanced five new performance metrics last year: 1) student progress and program-completion rates, 2) repayment and default rates on student loans, 3) institutional cost per

degree, 4) employment outcomes for graduates and 5) learning outcomes at the program level, as measured by data like core skills evaluations and professional qualifying examinations (Gardner, 2013).

- Third, it is impossible to know whether these performance metrics would have been achieved or bettered by other individuals who might have held these presidencies or, in fact, whether other individuals in these leadership positions might have failed to meet these largely impressive metrics in light of the fact that all the research participants here served during all of the Great Recession.
- Finally, at least three of the institutions in this study were arguably in serious financial jeopardy at the time their respective presidents assumed office. It can reasonably be suggested that the continued existence of these institutions today is testimony to these presidents' transformative contributions, whether or not effectively portrayed in some of these revenue and enrollment data.

Nonetheless, in general terms, the data in Table 1 indicate that all of these institutions performed well under the leadership of these 10 presidents in periods that included some of the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression.

Table 1 – Core Revenue and Fall Enrollment Data

University/College	Base Year/2012 Revenue	Base Year/2012 Enrollment
#1 Large, Private, Urban, Highly Residential	$312MM (2003) to $518MM	14,731 (2003) to 15,170

#2 Medium, Private, Suburban, Largely Residential	$74MM (2006) to $63MM	989 (2006) to 3,584
#3 Very Small, Private, Urban, Highly Residential	$27MM (2003) to $31MM	942 (2003) to 1,324
#4 Small, Private, Rural, Highly Residential	$23MM (2006) to $25MM	565 (2006) to 2,011
#5 Large, Private, Urban, Highly Residential	$1,050MM (2003) to $1,274MM	29,049 (2003) to 32,603
#6 Small, Private, Suburban, Highly Residential	$25MM (2003) to $34MM	1,196 (2003) to 1,980
#7 Small, Private, Urban, Primarily Residential	$25MM (2001) to $54MM	2,990 (2001) to 3,602
#8 Medium, Private, Urban, Primarily Residential	$68MM (2008) to $105MM	4,372 (2008) to 4,830
#9 Small, Public, Rural, Highly Residential	$29MM (2001) to $41MM	1,613 (2001) to 1,799
#10 Medium, Public, Urban, Primarily Residential	$207MM (2006) to $317MM	9,074 (2006) to 16,294

Interestingly, several of these institutions had never before undertaken a formal visioning and/or strategic-planning exercise prior to these presidents' tenures or, minimally, had not done so in a significant number of years. The president of a large, private, urban university said that, for example, "There was no vision here. We went seven decades without one."

Demographic Profile (Presidents and Institutions)

The purposeful sample was comprised of four women and six men, all of whom are serving in their first college or university presidency with one exception. That exception is a Roman Catholic priest who is leading his second Jesuit university. Four of the research participants do not hold doctoral degrees and were recruited to their posts directly from the private or not-for-profit/human services sectors.

The institutions represent a diverse portfolio of colleges and universities. Six of them are based in cities, two in suburbs and two in rural communities. All of them are located east of the Mississippi River: Ohio (1), New York (1), Kentucky (1), New Hampshire (1) and Massachusetts (6). Having said this, geographic location was not a selection criterion for this study. Again, the most important selection criterion for choosing this mix of institutions is that they are perceived to have been positively transformed under each president's leadership and would objectively qualify as success stories. For example, three of the presidents leading now-healthy colleges or universities reported that their institutions were failing and at risk of financial insolvency when they started their presidencies and related vision-development work.

All ten of the institutions offer degrees at the Baccalaureate, Masters and Doctoral levels. Each of them is residential. Eight of the institutions are private and two are public. One of these publics is a small, rural college and the other a medium-size, urban university led by a chancellor. Overall, five of the institutions are described by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education™ as Very Small (1) or Small (4) in terms of overall enrollment. Three of them are Medium and two are Large in size.

One of the universities is a major Jesuit institution and one of the colleges is of the Lutheran faith tradition.

Table 2 – Brief Demographic Profile

University/College	Gender	First Presidency	Doctoral Degree
#1 Large, Private, Urban, Highly Residential	Male	No	Yes
#2 Medium, Private, Suburban, Largely Residential	Male	Yes	Yes
#3 Very Small, Private, Urban, Highly Residential	Female	Yes	No
#4 Small, Private, Rural, Highly Residential	Female	Yes	Yes
#5 Large, Private, Urban, Highly Residential	Male	Yes	Yes
#6 Small, Private, Suburban, Highly Residential	Male	Yes	No
#7 Small, Private, Urban, Primarily Residential	Male	Yes	Yes
#8 Medium, Private, Urban, Primarily Residential	Female	Yes	No
#9 Small, Public, Rural, Highly Residential	Female	Yes	Yes
#10 Medium, Public, Urban, Primarily Residential	Male	Yes	No

Overview of Findings

The 21 findings presented in this chapter respond specifically to the four research questions. They do so by identifying and discussing: RQ1) seven operating modalities, RQ2) five presidential roles, RQ3) seven role-based presidential success factors and RQ4) two substantive, related issues concerning balancing ownership of a vision between presidents and stakeholders in the context of the shared-governance issues described in Chapter Two. These findings emerge directly from the interviews and are conveyed in

this chapter in the words (and occasionally observations about the body language, tone of voice and materials) of the research participants.

The presidents unanimously agreed with some of the findings to be discussed in detail throughout this chapter. Other findings found convergence among many or most of the presidents but, importantly, not all of them. These represent areas of modest or even significant albeit useful and interesting differences of opinion. For other findings, there is wholesale divergent opinion among the presidents about their roles and responsibilities in vision development owing, perhaps, to contrasting views of the substance and style of leadership and the perception of what ultimately works in the shared-governance model of higher education.

In summary, the findings include:

Research Question #1

1. All the presidents led their visioning initiatives on a formal, titular basis.
2. Half the presidents appointed other senior officials to direct the visioning process on an operational, day-to-day basis.
3. Six of the research participants utilized outside experts to inform and assist with the visioning process.
4. Eight of the presidents incorporated visioning directly into their strategic-planning initiatives.
5. Four of the research participants did not develop formal vision statements as part of their visioning work, all by design.
6. Only one president raised the essential role of market research in developing institutional vision.
7. All presidents said they prepared for vision development in varied ways, personally and organizationally, but indicated that they relied most on personal experience and expertise.

Research Question #2

8. All the presidents advocated for inclusion of key stakeholders in the process, though some spoke about the need to refrain from including too many people in the work.

9. Six research participants spoke of the need to set an appropriate collaborative tone for vision development.

10. Four presidents said they worked to encourage creativity and institutional ambition among staffs and stakeholders participating in the vision-development process.

11. Several presidents spoke of their countervailing, fiduciary responsibility, however, to protect their institutions against misguided ambition and unsustainable visions.

12. Seven research participants said they had to drive the visioning process and convey a sense of urgency about its completion.

Research Question #3

13. All the presidents underscored the importance of the vision-development process and their roles in it.

14. Several presidents stressed the importance of grounding the visioning in the reality of their specific institutional contexts.

15. All the research participants were focused on the importance of language in visioning and, in a few cases, sought to define key terms.

16. Six of the presidents spoke about managing their boards of trustees through the visioning process skillfully and carefully, albeit for varied motivations.

17. Four presidents spoke about the importance of making connections between the vision and strategic metrics during the vision-development process.

18. Several research participants said they aligned their vision-development efforts with key institutional initiatives such as reaccreditation, capital campaigns and master planning.

19. Eight of the presidents reported using the vision in making major decisions about, for example, enrollment and fundraising.

Research Question #4

20. Several presidents said they were asked about their vision for the institution during the recruitment process and had to carefully manage these expectations.

21. Seven of the research participants said in varying ways that they developed their own top-down vision for their institutions while, at the same time, engineering bottoms-up buy-in in order to achieve those personal visions.

Table 3 depicts Findings by Research Participant Concurrence organized by each of the four research questions. The table illustrates whether each of the 10 presidents concurred with the findings (or not) or even raised the issue as something with which they would otherwise concur even if it was not prompted by the Interview Guide. Indeed, the findings are generally organized by the convergent opinion of the *majority* of the research participants, though some important findings do emerge from the views of a minority of presidents. The discussion that follows in Chapter Four also provides considerable insight into divergent opinions presidents held about some of these findings.

Table 3 Findings by Research Participant Concurrence

President of a Finding by RQ	#1 Large, Private, Urban	#2 Medium, Private, Suburban	#3 Very Small, Private, Urban	#4 Small, Private, Rural	#5 Large, Private, Urban	#6 Small, Private, Suburban	#7 Small, Private, Urban	#8 Medium, Private, Urban	#9 Small, Public, Rural	#10 Medium, Public, Urban
RQ1 - #1 Led visioning on formal, titular basis	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RQ1 - #2 Appointed other senior officials to direct day-to-day visioning work.	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓
RQ1 - #3 Utilized outside experts to inform and assist with visioning.	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
RQ1 - #4 Incorporated visioning into strategic-planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

initiatives.										
RQ1 - #5 Developed formal vision statements.	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
RQ1 - #6 Incorporated market research into vision development.		✓								
RQ1 - #7 Prepared in varied ways for vision development, but relied most on experience and expertise.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RQ2 - #8 Advocated for inclusion of key stakeholders in the vision-development process.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RQ2 - #9 Set an appropriate collaborative tone for vision development.		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
RQ2 - #10 Encouraged ambition and creativity among staff and stakeholders.			✓	✓			✓			✓
RQ2 - #11 Protected their institutions against misguided ambition and unsustainable visions.		✓						✓	✓	
RQ2 - #12 Drove the visioning process and conveyed sense of urgency.	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
RQ3 - #13 Underscored importance of vision-development process and their roles in it.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

RQ3 - #14 Grounded vision development in the reality of institutional context.				✓	✓				✓	✓
RQ3 - #15 Focused on the importance of language and defined key terms.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RQ3 - #16 Managed boards of trustees, skillfully and carefully.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RQ3 - #17 Made connections between vision and strategic metrics.	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			✓
RQ3 - #18 Aligned vision development with strategic initiatives.	✓		✓				✓		✓	
RQ3 - #19 Use the vision in major presidential decision making.	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RQ4 - #20 Managed expectations to have a vision during the presidential search.						✓	✓	✓		✓
RQ4 - #21 Developed top-down vision, engineered bottoms-up buy-in.	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Research Question #1

RQ1. How do presidents organize and prepare for vision-development processes?

This section explores seven modalities emerging from the interviews that address how the research participants say they organized and prepared for their vision-development efforts. All participants said they utilized various types of committees or task forces – some groups as few as 25 people others exceeding 200 – to develop and manage their visioning and/or integrated strategic-planning processes. These groups typically represented a cross-section of diverse institutional interests, including undergraduate programs and graduate schools as well as key stakeholders such as trustees, faculty, staff and alumni. They all reported that chairmen and champions were appointed for various subcommittees that worked on specific aspects of their visioning and planning initiatives, especially in strategic-planning domains such as objectives, strategies and tactics. These strategic-planning processes are not the focus of this specific research about how presidents engage in top-line vision development, however, though some discussion about presidents' roles working with key stakeholders follows later in this chapter.

The seven organizing modalities that emerged from the interviews and that are of specific interest in this section include: 1) whether the president or somebody else led the visioning process on a formal, titular basis, 2) what types of individuals actually directed the process in day-to-day operational terms, 3) whether outside experts owned or shared responsibility for the process and the nature of the relationship between the presidents and these outside agents, 4) whether the visioning work was contained within an overarching strategic-planning exercise, 5) whether presidents sought to develop formal

vision statements, 6) whether the presidents spoke to the use and utility of market research to inform their visioning work, and 7) how presidents prepared themselves and their organizations to undertake the work. Data on the first four modalities are summarized in Table 4.

Finding # 1 – Led visioning initiatives on a formal, titular basis. The presidents all chose to lead their visioning initiatives on a formal, titular basis, though each president's actual level of engagement and intervention in the process varied widely. All the research participants believed they needed to lead the effort from the top and in name, and all of them said they wanted to do so. Just as important, they all seemed to understand the added importance of being visible and being seen as leading the effort, as well. Several presidents commented on the importance of organizational optics in terms of their own leadership visibility, especially as all of them were in the first year on the job at the time of their first visioning and/or strategic-planning initiatives.

Finding 2 – Appointed other senior officials to direct the day-to-day visioning work. Half the presidents (5 of 10) asked other senior officials to direct the actual visioning work on an operational, day-to-day basis. Five of the presidents chose to lead their visioning exercises both formally and operationally, which was a higher percentage of presidents than the researcher expected at the outset of the process. The types of individuals who directed day-to-day visioning in lieu of the president were, by title, an Executive Vice President, Provost co-chairing with an EVP, Vice President for Advancement, a committee of Vice Presidents, and an external consultant.

The five presidents who directed their actual day-to-day visioning processes were adamant about their need to do so. They believed they needed to exert hands-on, day-to-day leadership roles because of the precarious nature of their institutions, expectations from their boards of trustees for improving institutional performance and, as reported above, the relative newness of their presidencies. The leader of a large, private, urban university believed he had no choice but to direct visioning activities on an operational basis. His prestigious, globally renowned university had not undertaken a comparable initiative in decades so, in his words:

> I drove it. It was me. ……. The university had become more polarized and insular between schools and colleges than it needed to be. …… I guess this is my jaded view is that if you leave it to the university to define the strategic plan it's a thousand flowers blooming. I just can't buy into that. I let them know that and I let the board of trustees know that. I played more of a CEO role in the plan.

The president of a small, private, urban institution said she had to lead the initiative operationally because previous visioning and planning efforts were a "disaster," including the fact that a highly regarded consultant facilitating the last attempt prior to her presidency "promptly fell asleep at the board meeting when he was finished talking." There was simply too much from which to recover in the eyes of trustees and other stakeholders and too much at stake. She knew her visible operational leadership in the process was needed to overcome previous failed efforts. When asked about her decision to lead the effort operationally, she repeated four times, "Absolutely," adding that at a time when her institution was in considerable financial peril, "It was important to me that this planning and our financial planning be tightly integrated."

Another participant who came to his presidency from a business career also chose to direct the visioning process operationally. He believed his background made it necessary and appropriate for him to play this role saying:

> This is my area of expertise. And in order to make sure that it was done the way I wanted, I did it myself. ….. And so, you know, I chose to do it myself and that would be unusual, but people supported my doing it and it worked out well, because I have a lot of experience.

This point of view runs in sharp contrast to other presidents who sought a more shared or distributed leadership model for designing and implementing their visioning processes. For example, the chancellor of a medium-size, public, urban university who was previously a national political figure and professes a keen understanding of internal political machinations said, "Picking the right leaders (of the process) right away is key." His choice of co-directors in the form of his provost and EVP provided him with both the "inside and outside juice" needed to get the job done. By "outside juice," he was referring to the role and credibility of his then-recently-hired provost in helping to drive the extraordinary *U.S. News & World Report* ranking gains at another, rival university. "The combination of the two is great," he added.

The president of a large, private, urban institution who came to his presidency from MIT led his institution's visioning efforts formally and operationally, though he had never previously served in these roles. Interestingly, he noted that MIT does not have a formal institutional vision statement or accompanying strategic plan because, "They know who they are and where they are going. They don't want it." He believed the institution he had joined as president found itself in quite an opposite state of affairs.

One of the presidents spoke passionately about the great difficulty of leading a visioning process, given the pull of daily, short-term operational requirements of running her institution:

> It's hard. As leaders, it's hard. You get so caught up in the daily operational work, especially if you are fragile and not one of the big boys with money and reputation. There are tensions with short-term issues, and you need to find the balance between short and long term. ….. You need to connect big vision to short-term needs to get people to focus on the long-term needs.

Another president of a large, private, urban university said he took a risk appointing a team of vice presidents and not just one or two individuals to direct the operational aspects of this assignment. He remarked that the team performed admirably and he used the process early in his tenure so that, "We could all get to know each other." He pointed to only one vice president who, "did nothing." In commenting on the need to have the right talent in place for vision and strategy development, he added, "I trusted the guy and he lied to me for a year and a half." It's interesting to note here that this president may have run greater risks had he chosen just one person to direct these operational aspects and that one person was this particular vice president. He acknowledged the benefits of spreading his risks in this regard, though he exhibited real anger at this long-since-dismissed vice president.

Finding #3 – Utilized outside experts to inform and assist with the visioning process: A slight majority (6 of 10) of the presidents utilized external consultants or facilitators to assist with their visioning initiatives. All participants reported enjoying trusted, pre-existing relationships with these consultants. In one situation, the consultant who provided some support throughout the visioning process was a member of the board

of trustees and provided his firm's services on a pro-bono basis. When pressed on the possible complexities and even political difficulties of using a board member and that trustee's company to play a role in visioning, this president said she had no problem with the arrangement.

However, only one president appears to have used an external consultant to direct the entire process. Everyone else who used external consultants applied their services on more limited, situational bases that played to consultants' specific expertise and filled gaps in the knowledge and experience of the existing staff. Interestingly, the president who relied heavily on an external consultant said her institution's new vision and strategic direction lacked a needed "implementation path" and that there were "no metrics" for understanding whether her college was making progress in realizing the vision:

> We should have been clearer about implementation objectives. It (the vision) was too squishy. We were too process oriented. We as leaders here should have had much more clarity. ….. As the boss, I did not do as good a job in this.

These sentiments contrast vividly with the president of a large, private, urban university who said he stressed with participants throughout his process that, "We measure against the vision." Of course, one cannot ascribe these shortfalls to the fact that an external consultant played too large a role in the process. Still, it may be worth hypothesizing whether the consultant's role in the case above unintentionally precluded or diffused greater involvement in and commitment to the visioning process among the president and her senior team.

In another situation, by contrast, a president who twice undertook visioning at her institution used a different external consultant the second time she led the process. In the first circumstance she "brought in a guy I knew from a past life" and carefully managed his role. In the second case, as her institution started to recover, she and her team hired a larger consulting firm, which she also said she carefully managed. In both iterations, however, she emphasized, "I did not want outsiders driving the process because I wanted our people to own it. I don't believe in outsiders running it."

Finding #4 – Incorporated visioning into strategic-planning initiatives: A large majority of the presidents (eight of ten) reported including vision development within their overall strategic-planning processes, often addressed at or near the start of such work. Two presidents chose first to establish institutional vision through relatively independent processes, however, that occurred in advance of their institutions' subsequent strategic-planning exercises though still fully connected to them. Interestingly, one president personally wrote her institution's vision statement after a considerable portion of the strategic-planning work had been undertaken, developing a vision notably later in the strategic-planning process than her peers in this study. She believed this was the best way to incorporate the full input of her community though, as it turns out, she was the only president among the research participants to have written the vision statement personally and solely.

The research participants all believed that vision represents much of an institution's formal strategic direction and is not limited to vision statements, per se. With the exception of that one president, all the research participants agreed that vision-development work occurs at the start of a strategic-planning cycle – or even in advance of

it – but that it nonetheless encompasses key aspects of an institution's future orientation and destination through and including the setting of objectives (one president called these "commitments" while another called them "directions") and the creation of strategies to achieve their vision. In this sense, neither institutional vision nor a president's engagement in its development exist in isolation from the larger body of strategic-planning work, especially at the start of the planning process where the focus is typically on overarching institutional objectives.

There was substantial recognition among the research participants that vision creation is but one part of larger planning processes, albeit a particularly essential and catalytic one. This view is also supported in the strategic-planning literature referenced in Chapter Two. At the same time, and possibly as a result of this integral and even overlapping relationship between vision and strategy, some of these research participants seem to be conflating the two concepts. In other words, when some presidents spoke of vision and vision development during the interviews they were sometimes speaking about strategy and strategic planning and vice versa.

On the one hand, this suggests that greater precision is needed in separating, specifying and clarifying the terms vision and strategy. On the other hand, however, this conflation also suggests that vision could be more broadly thought of as what might be called *visionary intent*. In the course of this work, it became clear that visionary intent is readily found throughout presidents' strategic conceptualizations of their institutions' futures as well as the strategy-planning processes used to develop vision and the materials created to articulate and animate it. As such, the lines between vision development and strategic planning are blurred. This is at it should be – and needs to be –

in assessing the words of the research participants and certainly reading between the lines of their statements. As one participant said, “Vision cannot sit in isolation.” Indeed, while there is some conflation of the vision and strategy terms and concepts, it is arguably a useful one because, taken together, it presents a fuller, more comprehensive view of a president’s and an institution’s full visionary intent in the form of vision, objectives and strategies.

Interestingly, in this context, some of the materials presidents use to formally and publicly convey future-oriented strategic direction include the word “vision” in their titles, whether or not those colleges and universities actually possess a formal vision statement (see Finding #5 below). For example, among the institutions included in this study, a small, private, suburban college’s strategic plan is entitled, *Vision 2017*. A large, private, urban university’s strategic plan is called, *Choosing to be Great: A Vision of (University) Past, Present, and Future*. The chancellor of a medium-size, public, urban university used his inauguration to address key themes and establish a foundation for strategic planning by publishing early in his tenure a document with the sub-title, *Building a New Vision Together*.

Table 4 – Summary of Four Modalities

President Role Part of Strategic Planning Initiative (Y/N)	Formally Led	Operationally Led	External Help
1. Large, Private, Urban (Yes)	Yes	No. Led by VP Committee.	Yes
2. Medium, Private, Suburban (Yes)	Yes	No. Led by EVP.	Yes
3. Very Small, Private, Urban (Yes)	Yes	No. Led by external consultant.	No
4. Small, Private, Rural (Yes)	Yes	No. Led by VP.	Yes
5. Large, Private, Urban (Yes)	Yes	Yes.	Yes

6. Small, Private, Suburban (Yes)	Yes	Yes	No
7. Small, Private, Urban (No)	Yes	Yes	Yes
8. Medium, Private, Urban (No)	Yes	Yes	Yes
9. Small, Public, Rural (Yes)	Yes	Yes	Yes
10. Medium, Public, Urban (No)	Yes	No. Led by Provost and EVP.	No

Finding #5 – Developed formal vision statements – or not: Four (of 10) of the institutions represented in this study do not actually have formal vision statements, which was an unexpectedly high outcome. In fact, two particularly visionary presidents asserted strong opposition to the use of vision statements in general, believing that brief statements cannot adequately capture the complexity of today's modern academy and its operating environment. As discussed above, they fully engaged in the process and outcomes of visionary intent without necessarily promulgating specific vision statements. Suffice it to say that when presidents spoke of vision in these interviews, they were often referring to overall strategic direction and a shared picture of a future destination in which vision statements can be key components and catalysts for action, but not necessarily so. In this sense, some presidents maintained that formal vision statements are not needed as part of formal visionary intent. And all presidents exhibited visionary intent that transcended formal vision statements and extended to key components of strategic planning such as overarching institutional objectives.

One advocate of this transcendent nature of vision beyond formal vision statements stated emphatically that, "I don't believe in vision statements," adding that, "you can't get it done in one statement. Only some universities can do it like NYU with its international model." It is clear from this study, however, that the lack of formal

institutional vision statements does not represent a lack of vision or visionary intent on the part of these presidents.

Finding #6 – Incorporated market research specifically into vision development: Only one president raised the role of market research in vision development. His institution appears to be the only one in the sample to have undertaken comprehensive, multi-constituent market research to inform and inspire the visioning process – or even the subsequent strategic-planning work, for that matter. This president of a small, private, suburban university chose his Executive Vice President – "my alter ego," whom he also labeled his "imaginer-in-chief" – to direct the visioning initiative (and integrated strategic-planning effort) because of the latter's expertise in market research – among other selection criteria. The president believes strongly in the role of research in informing vision:

> Well, my degree of course is in ancient history. I know tons about ancient history, but that doesn't necessarily inform a vision for the future. ….. It wasn't just that I like (the person he chose to lead the effort operationally) as a person or that his office was near mine. (He) has a research PhD in higher education administration and so he had the research capacity, capabilities, staff who can answer all my questions for me. ….. So, I would say, I guess that an institution is endangered if the visioning process isn't grounded in research.

This president said that objective, market-focused research complements a leader's experience. He was adamant about the use of rigorous research as the basis for understanding where his institution objectively and realistically stood at the time and assessing what was then needed to imagine a compelling albeit obtainable vision of a future state:

> Essentially I think a vision while it should inspire both action and confidence, it probably is primarily a product of research and experience. The reason I say that is because I am more experienced, I suppose, over time. But I have come to rely increasingly on research; my own research as well as the research of others before I talk about vision, before I began imagining out loud. And so experience has always been a part of it; will be for anyone. I am not sure that research is always involved in the visioning, but it should be.

He added:

> I used evenings researching, thinking, comparing and looking at what other competitor institutions and aspirant institutions are dealing with. You go back and see what's happening to your students who are going through the program and what are their hopes and aspirations. It seems to me that research is the only way you are able to answer all those questions before you began putting together a vision for the future.

A question about the role of market research in vision development was not formally included in the Interview Guide. On an unaided basis, however, this president made it central to his description of effective vision development and his role in it. Despite some conceptual and rhetorical confusion between vision and strategy generally, addressed elsewhere in this study, this president was not speaking here about the role of research in SWOT analyses and other aspects of strategic planning. His institution utilized a market research firm to calibrate awareness, attitudes, expectations and motivations of key stakeholders to inform and inspire his visioning process and, only later, to support his strategic planning, too. He added that he valued both the market research feedback from key constituencies as well as the role of the research itself in engaging stakeholders in the visioning process.

On a related note concerning secondary research, no presidents commented on the acquisition of market intelligence about their competitors' visions, let alone the collection

of other institutions' vision statements, as part of their own vision-development work. The president of a large, private, urban university did say his team examined metrics for "competitors such as NYU, Northeastern and USC" for strategic-planning purposes, which is more common, but nobody surfaced the idea of collecting vision statements from elsewhere to inform and inspire their own processes.

One can speculate as to the risks of insularity in any institutional visioning initiative that is not informed by viewpoints beyond those engaged in the internal process. Another president seemed to validate this concern in commenting about effective presidents generally, advising that, "Through my own research (on the college presidency) I realized that some of the presidents who were the most successful were those who were very externally focused." Despite being referenced by a single president in this study, one can argue that this president is nonetheless correct and that external lens of market research plays a constructive role in vision development. The researcher has added this point to the findings and considers the absence of the role of market research in vision development from the other presidents' remarks to be noteworthy.

Finding #7 – Prepared in varied ways for vision development, personally and organizationally, but relied most on personal experience and expertise: All the presidents believe their own experience and expertise were the most important factors in preparing them to lead vision-development and related strategic-planning work, although a variety of other factors also influenced their engagement in vision development. These assertions were made despite the fact that only four of the research participants reported previously leading a visioning and/or strategic-planning process in their careers. As reported above, one of the four presidents who led the visioning process both formally and operationally

considers himself to be an expert in visioning and strategic planning, having previously served as a consultant in this area.

Several participants said they attended Harvard University's Seminar for New Presidents and otherwise consulted on visioning and strategic planning with the highly regarded director of that program, Judith Block McLaughlin. The Seminar's website does list strategic planning among its key program objectives, though specific reference to vision development is not made.

Some participants said they read books and articles on leadership, strategic planning and/or the college presidency prior to their exercises and, in a few cases, shared them with their visioning teams. Another president said in frustration that, "I bought a few books on strategic planning; all relatively worthless." Another research participant said she reread James Fisher's classic book for new college and university presidents, *The Power of the Presidency*. One president said he distributed copies of Michael Watkins' book, *The First 90 Days: Proven Strategies for Getting Up to Speed Faster and Smarter*. The president of a large, private, urban university said he shared with his team Jim Collins' *Good to Great* and the accompany monograph, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*. He offered that he has been "a fan" of Jim Collins' work for many years:

> When we started doing planning, I gave everybody *Good to Great* and the addendum for non-profits because I like some of the concepts in his language. Our plan is absolutely a 'hedgehog' plan. We put our head down, we knew where we want to go and just drove it. So, he would call it a hedgehog. I had a conversation with him about that. I was influenced by that. I was influenced by the way he thought about management, and I think I'm probably in our management much more his kind of hedgehog CEO than most university presidents, right? Because I really enjoy the operating part of the university, and one of the problems in this business today is that there are so many attributes they look for in a president that operations has, kind of, I wouldn't say it's getting

deemphasized, but certainly charisma and the big vision is something people respond to today.

One president had her team read Patrick Lencioni's *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*, prior to the start of their work together. Another president, trained in the theater, invoked with her team the unnamed character in Jack London's essay, *To Build a Fire*, who is thoroughly unprepared to survive his ordeal in the Yukon. In encouraging her colleagues to dare to be creative in their visioning work, she paraphrased the first page of the essay:

> In the first page of the short story, I think the line is, 'trouble was that the man lacked imagination,' and I loved that line. And of course that's kind of a dark, it's totally Jack London. He gives you a clue at the beginning, the first page, that this man is not going to make it. I like that because I think that to be truly visionary you have to imagine the best of our worlds – where your ideas can take you –what could happen and you have to also simultaneously see the worst of all worlds.

As a side consideration here, it is interesting to note the congruence between this president's background in theater and literature and the Bolman and Gallos (2011) use of the theater metaphor for understanding the "stages" of higher education referenced in Chapter Two.

Every one of the presidents in this study had either turned around their institutions and/or are continuing to do so. That president's reminder of the benefits of imagining "the worst of all worlds" helped her punctuate for her people the tough conditions of their institution early in her tenure and, by contrast, the much better place in which it could head. As another president said of visioning given the financially precarious, existential state of her institution at the time, "We were dying. It was all about survival."

The president of a large, private, urban university that has soared in *U.S. News & World Report* rankings in recent years characterized the state of his institution upon embarking on the visioning as in a "death spiral," born of extreme tuition dependence, "horrendously bad budget habits," and the practice historically of "buying students" with scholarship funds "we couldn't afford." The president of a small, private, rural institution summarized this point well, referencing the lowest, survival-related tier of Maslow's Needs Hierarchy and suggesting that, "At the end of the day, the best vision is about survival – for the long term." In general, the presidents seem to have used the emotions associated with having been "in the worst of all worlds" as fuel to drive their visioning activities and repair, restore and revitalize their institutions.

For some presidents, preparation for their visioning initiative brought forward inspiration about the specific albeit anecdotal envisioned accomplishments of other institutions. One president spoke about Boston College and Georgetown creating bold visions for their turnarounds in the 1980s, reminding his people and that their own Jesuit institution could certainly do the same thing. He presented those two institutions as aspirants for his university in the course of their vision-inspired turnaround efforts, assuring everyone at the time that, "we knew it was possible." He added in another case that, "NYU was nothing in the 1970s" but, as another president referenced above, New York University used its vision of internationalism in the 1990s to "achieve great things in a short period of time."

Another research participant leading a private university, who said his vision included partnerships on economic and workforce development with his state, described how he watched "institutions like Vanderbilt, Emory and Duke really mature. Look what

Vanderbilt has done for Nashville as well as (Emory's role in) the amazing development of Atlanta." He added that "no institution wants to be any other institution, but look at what Vanderbilt has done." This president's inspiration energized his aspirations for best practices found at other institutions – albeit, again, anecdotally sourced and not formally derived from secondary or primary market research – and certainly shaped his vision-development preparation and engagement. Furthermore, he praised his state Governor's vision and followed that Governor's lead on economic development in a phenomenon he described as "vision feeding vision," yet another source of preparatory inspiration.

The chancellor of a medium-size, public, urban institution said he studied Arizona State University President Michael Crow's highly regarded strategic visioning work to help him answer the question, "What do you do with the crackpots" on the faculty? He said Crow's work taught him:

> Not to criticize the faculty because it deepens their entrenchment; because it will get back to them. ….. You have to give opponents a forum to articulate what they think. Let them lay it on the table. Let it breathe.

Research Question #2

RQ2. What roles do presidents ascribe to themselves in developing institutional vision?

This section of the study builds on the presidents' views of preparation and organization discussed above. Here, the focus is on five specific roles presidents reported playing in their actual vision-development activities. Undertaken as a whole and at the same time, several presidents suggested that these roles can be difficult to play since some of them are or may seem to be contradictory. For example, as will be discussed below, some presidents spoke of their role in encouraging participants to be creative and ambitious in their visioning activities while, at the same time, working to protect the institution in a fiduciary sense from visions that are so creative and ambitious as to risk being untenable, unsustainable or downright impossible to achieve.

Answers to all the research questions in this study describe key presidential roles in vision development. The seven findings concerning preparation and organization of vision development above are replete with descriptions of roles and role-based behaviors, of course, but they occur within the context of answering Research Question #1. So too, other presidential roles emerge in response to the specific orientation of Research Questions #3 and #4. The five findings detailed in this section, however, transcend these questions and are applicable to presidents' roles in vision development more broadly and across the board.

Finding #8 – Advocated for inclusion of key stakeholders in the process: All presidents spoke substantially of their role in advocating for sufficient inclusion among key stakeholders in the visioning process. They all underscored the indispensable role of

effective inclusion in achieving the necessary buy-in to the vision and any resulting strategic direction. This finding was among those raised with greatest frequency in the interviews. It became evident, too, that presidents strove for optimal but not necessarily maximum inclusion in their visioning processes, understanding what several suggested are the risks of including too many people in the process.

Still, the presidents eagerly addressed their roles in engineering and safeguarding inclusive environments. The leader of a small, private, suburban college spoke enthusiastically about the benefits of doing so:

> The result is now you get everybody marching in the same direction after a common picture of the future. In every organization I have ever run which is quite a few now, if you are going to do that, this magic thing occurs. It happens, because people feel like they own it. They feel like they are part of it. They helped to create it. And they are all moving in the same direction with the same set of values and, therefore, it is highly likely that most of what you set out to do you are going to achieve.

Key exceptions to this inclusionary impulse concerned some presidents' views of including alumni and especially students in visioning processes. Most presidents incorporated these stakeholders into their initiatives though, notably, a few of them argued against doing so. When asked about including students and alumni in visioning, one president furrowed his brow and shook his head negatively in response as if to suggest he found this an unappealing idea. Another president of a large, private, urban university said:

> I had no students and alumni involved. There are two parts of me that react here. The first is that I try to separate the customer from the employee. The second is getting advice that you will not take. In many cases, if you go out, for example, to alumni and alumni come back overwhelmingly with the big petition that puts football back and you have to say no. Well, now you're not listening to them.

In this sense, the president did not appear to be downgrading student or alumni involvement. Quite possibly, he had the contrary impulse. His response suggests an elevated albeit cautious role for the "customer" in his view and the risks of alienating these customers by accepting their input on vision and strategic direction and not adhering to it. He said, "I'm very sensitive about not creating expectations that we can't deliver."

Indeed, presidents suggested throughout these interviews that they needed to balance motivations for inclusion and ambitious, creative engagement (See Finding #10 below) among stakeholders in the vision-development process with concerns about creating excessively high or unwarranted expectations. This is one of many the presidential balancing acts that will be considered in Chapter Five.

In elaborating about the lack of alumni engagement in the visioning process, this same president added:

> The alumni were so disenfranchised from the university. I spent the first year going to alumni meetings where people were, like, public town meetings of gripes. There was just no constructive group. ….. We had notoriously bad alumni programs here and, in fact, we had to blow up the (alumni association). They were clueless, so I gave them no role in visioning. I didn't bring them in.

It is likely that inclusion of some but not other stakeholders is situationally dependent and a matter of specific institutional context. By contrast, presidents with less reportedly dysfunctional alumni bodies seemed to welcome these stakeholders into the process.

All participants said that advocating for some measure of inclusion was essential, as was being *seen* as advocating for inclusion. The matter of "optics" was never far from the presidents' minds when dealing with stakeholders and concerns about the political fallout from failing to be open and inclusive. Effectively managing both the reality of inclusion as well as the perception of inclusion was deemed highly important by the presidents in this study.

"The key for me was ensuring broad participation in the process," the president of a small, private, suburban university said. "People should feel free to dream and aspire," he added, "and my role was to encourage and protect that." The leader of a very small, private, urban college said, "My role was to constantly clarify that we wanted an inclusive process. I had to continually remind people that this was not my vision; it's a shared vision." The president of a small, private, rural college spoke in the context of inclusion about needing to live with so many opinions, some of them negative:

> Opinions (here) are not in short supply. When I first got here, of course, the mood was not so good. I got mad; you send an email out and say it's a nice day and 20 people will fire back just to tell you what an idiot you are. ….. You always get negative feedback. I would much rather have that, and I will tell you what I think. You kind of harness that and there was a certain amount of trust that is present when someone is willing to tell you exactly what they think and it is not necessarily all good and therefore it is a compliment and you have to take it as such that that person is not afraid of you, is not afraid of retribution from their words.

She further supported her point about the benefits of honoring the negative criticism in an inclusive environment:

> They care. They are passionate, and my only ground rules have been – and it didn't really exist with my predecessor – as long as we do this in civil manner. I don't care if you tell me you are going to think I am terrible in

> what I do, nobody said that, but do it in civil manner. Let's not get into insults and name calling and saying terrible things, as I have seen that too.

Indeed, many of the presidents addressed the need to include what one of them called "naysayers" in the process to build trust and credibility and project leadership openness and magnanimousness. According to another president, the key is to engender a process that builds momentum and ever-growing levels of support among stakeholders so that the president does not have to appear to be silencing unproductive critics of the vision and strategic direction:

> The naysayers are in abundance, but they get overruled by the majority. Some refuse to believe it (the university he leads) can be turned around ….. Colleges have self-pitying, non-believers and they rejoice in failure. They're opposed to any change. You have these people, and there's a self-pitying arrogance about this crowd.

Similar viewpoints were shared by other presidents, too. Assessing body language and tone of voice as well as considering what was *not* said during interviews on the subject of inclusion, one could hypothesize whether some presidents truly believe in inclusion on its own merits or, rather, simply see it as a necessary and sometimes painful means to an end. In other words, they may justifiably believe that failing to include enough of the right stakeholders in visioning could impair if not cripple the process and its outcomes.

The president of a small, private, urban institution spoke to the perils of inclusion carried too far, which she witnessed as a board member at her institution prior to assuming the presidency. Her concern did not focus on the type or numbers of people involved in the previous processes she observed. Rather, it was the nature of their input

and the lack of ground rules governing that input. Her body language conveyed considerable frustration as she relayed that:

> We got so bogged down on how many people have input on *every single word (italics to reflect her emphasis)*. It caused a lot of places where people got stuck. It was like pulling teeth, and never got anywhere.

The presidents also said that, as with the overall point about inclusion, listening and being seen as listening are key to ensuring an open, inclusive environment. To some, listening also mean actively and visibly incorporating stakeholders' views into the visioning work, so that participants could see that they were serious about inclusion and respectful of shared-governance structures. The president of a large, private, urban university said:

> The only smart thing to do is to listen as broadly as you can. You mirror back the vision. It doesn't need buy-in because they built it. If it's latent, make it blatant.

The matter of listening also found presidents valuing what one called the "therapeutic role" of a well-designed and effectively implemented vision-development processes. The leader of a large, private, urban university said:

> I listened to people for two years. ….. There was such a pent-up desire here for a return to glory. They wanted it. Everyone wants to tell you everything. It's validation of people's self-worth.

Another president reinforced what might be called a therapist-in-chief role when he described his task in vision development as being to, "Awaken a wonderful community here, awaken it to its power, value, and efficacy. And help build confidence in it so that it now is, I would say, largely framed by the vision."

Several presidents said that effective inclusion also meant being transparent with the visioning and planning process. They all spoke of the need to update their communities regularly on their progress and to illuminate to stakeholders what one referred to as "the underlying process" if they and the overall initiative were to maintain credibility and sustainability. The leader of a small, private, rural college said about the visioning process and the creation of visionary intent that, "Lots of persuasion has to go on. And you can only be persuasive if you foster an environment of transparency."

A final consideration raised by two presidents here is the role that their visioning exercises played in bringing together their leadership teams and overall communities under their new leadership. The fact this point was not raised more frequently is noteworthy. Nonetheless, the president of a small, private suburban college said:

> I saw it (initial visioning work) as a way to get to know the people, for the people get to know me, which is really important and turned out to be extremely useful prior to the process. To kind of bind people together, you know, it's a bonding exercise. That is the number one benefit of doing it. So they really should be across departments, between faculty and staff and students and alumni. So you get all the constituents involved.

Finding #9 – Set an appropriate collaborative tone for vision development: In a point related to inclusion, many presidents stressed the need to set a positive, open and even-handed tone throughout their visioning processes and to model that behavior. This finding emerged even as some of them reported confronting the "naysayers," "crackpots," "death spirals" and existential questions of "survival" referenced above as well as dealing with legacies of predecessors who failed to set the appropriate tone. The leader of a medium-size, public, urban university said:

> I was setting the tone because they (the university community) were

> skeptical that any chancellor would listen to them. There was a lot of skepticism, not just because of my background but it had been a long, long time since anyone had listened (to them) here and in fact probably never had. ….. So I think we had to demonstrate that we really wanted the input and, you know, people were like I can't believe that they were actually listening to us.

As she undertook visioning and strategic planning at her institution, the president of a small, public, rural college said:

> I set the tone. We began from a place of having everyone talk about what they loved about the place as well as our values, such as community.

This kind of tone setting may be a uniquely presidential requirement. Several presidents even added the need to restrain themselves and avoid too often appearing impatient and frustrated with people and the process, even though they reported being absolutely impatient and frustrated at times. Indeed, in this spirit, the president of a very small, private, urban college stressed how "careful" she was in the substance of what she said as well as the tone of how she said it in her vision-development work. "I tried to speak less. I realized that what I say has real impact."

Tone is important in portraying the future of organizations engaged in visioning, but the chancellor of a medium-sized, public, urban university argued that tone extends to the positioning and treatment of the institution's past, as well. He said, "In visioning, you don't criticize the past. You have to respect the legacy of your institution."

Finding #10 – Encouraged ambition and creativity among stakeholders: Many presidents said they constantly implored the participants in their vision-development processes to be, in the words of the leader of a small, private, rural college, "much more ambitious" in their deliberations. She urged her colleagues to "stretch," since, in her

words, “It’s a lot easier to pull back on creativity than it is to push forward.” She charged her colleagues with the expectation that, “It (vision) had better be ambitious and exciting, and yet doable.” Many presidents said they encouraged bold, daring and out-of-the-box thinking early in their visioning processes. Sometimes, this president said, even “the wackiest ideas” are useful.

One president said about his institution, “This place was sound asleep when I came in.” This was a recurring sentiment among the research participants, many of whom felt that they were inheriting leadership of disabled, underachieving organizations with staff that were too timid when it came to envisioning a bold but achievable future. In that context, this particular president said he invoked an infamous technique reportedly used by former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to embolden his staff members and to push the quality and daring of their work. He relayed that he periodically asked his subordinates engaged in visioning, in fine Kissinger fashion, “Is this the best you can do?” Another president said she pushed back the first draft of her institution’s envisioned future because, “It was not ambitious enough.”

Finding #11 – Protected against misguided ambition and unsustainable visions: Several presidents said they were required to play self-described fiduciary roles in which they cast themselves as guardians against bad ideas that could have made their visions unworkable, unsustainable or even of threat to their institutions’ credibility, solvency and viability. The president of a small, private, suburban university lamented not being sufficiently involved in shaping the outcomes of his visioning process. In terms of lessons learned, he said, “You have to be able to intercept, to step in, if the risks of the process or its product become too great,” he said.

> Academic institutions are essentially democratic institutions. They're egalitarian in that everyone has a Ph.D. ….. But you can't accept unsustainable ideas. So while you listen to all of them, nevertheless, there are times when the dissenting view is the right view. The president has to champion that dissenting voice and that to me was a lonely responsibility.

This president also commented on the costs and benefits of having stakeholders creatively stretch in envisioning their institution's future, referring to what he said became some of the "tall poles" of visionary intent that he either had to live with or try to reshape:

> The tall poles became too broad and too expansive in the hands of the faculty. The tall poles became corrupted when certain faculty got involved. They must be much more specific and refined.

He cited impetus that had gain ground through the visioning process for elevating the role of athletics at his university. A few members of his board of trustees had been championing the possibility of moving into Division 1 athletics:

> This vision is too grand. I wouldn't want to be in a courtroom trying to defend that or have that as a chapter about my presidency in (his institution's) history book. It's just a vision for Athletics but, my gosh, the dollars involved impact the whole university. Why is that becoming the vision for the whole university with all the consequences and appropriate questions around investment and academics and research and everything else?

This leader said that if he had to do it over again he would be, "a bit more interventionist in this regard" to head-off vision-development bandwagons carrying counterproductive or even impossible ideas that become too difficult to remove or change later in the process. In this sense, he would disagree with the president above who offered that "it's a lot easier to pull back on creativity than it is to push forward." He believed the opposite to be true, adding, "I don't want to be that disconnected next time." The president of a small, private, rural college added in this context that, "You have to reign

them (vision-development participants) in because they are so vocal and so creative. You have to give them parameters," she said.

The president of medium-size, private, suburban institution described in detail how he sought to find the right balance between "boldness" and "feasibility" of the vision. "These two are in constant tension with one another," he said, adding that, ultimately, his board of trustees were "enamored of the boldness but also the feasibility of it (the vision and visionary intent)." Indeed, Findings #10 and #11 create a dynamic tension for presidents who seek to balance the encouragement of bold, creative ideas with the protection their institutions need against damaging, misguided or unrealistic ambitions.

In summarizing his role and responsibility in the context of this finding, one president opined that, "Vision needs to be credible and not incredible if people are to believe and follow it." The president of a small, private, urban institution spoke in vivid terms about the need to keep participants focused on the reality of what is achievable:

> We have some real-world constraints like, we don't have any money so we can't go out or do something like, 'Oh, we are going to be like Smith College and we are going to build a school of engineering.' We didn't have money to do something novel like that. So we are going to have to work within the constraints of the resources we have. We also had to look at what were the biggest opportunities, which of course means also the largest worries, one of which was the competitiveness of the undergraduate college, which was just going down, down, down.

Finding #12 – Drove the visioning process while conveying a sense of urgency: Presidents spoke of their essential roles in driving the vision-development process, holding people accountable for results and cultivating a sense of urgency. Notably, several research participants used the word "cheerleader" in this context, a surprising term that could seem to minimize both the process and their role in it. The leader of a

large, private, urban university who professed not to be too deeply involved in the daily vision-development process said that, nonetheless, “I needed to be a goad as chairman as well as a cheerleader in order to keep everyone on target and on time.”

Interestingly, the chancellor of a medium-size, public, urban university underscored the presumed negative connotations of the word “cheerleader,” adding, for example, that there are critical roles for himself and all key stakeholders in vision development, but that “they don’t have to be cheerleaders. I don’t want them to be.” He didn’t see himself or his faculty as cheerleaders and he advised other presidents to avoid appearing to be cheerleaders.

This chancellor echoed the frustrations of many of the research participants who believed that without their constant prodding, their visioning and planning initiatives risked lacking in urgency. This reported lower-than-desired sense of urgency in some cases was seen by several presidents as a serious disadvantage in an increasingly complex and competitive higher education market. Keeping in mind that all the turnaround institutions in this purposeful sample were suffering or even failing at some point early in these presidents’ tenures, the presidential role of conveying urgency in vision development seems to be essential. The chancellor said:

> The faculty told me this process needed to take time; that it would take three years to develop. ….. I told them it needed to take a year or so, though I was willing to take 16 months. That will not represent a failure at all. I am just asking you though if you need more than a year, let us have a really good reason to need more than a year

The leader of a small, public, rural university admitted to using the fear of circumstance, and expressly not any personal fear of her, to capture the required sense of

urgency. “I had to scare them because our metrics were so bad,” she said. Another president contradicted this approach, saying “No, no, no.” in response to using fear – circumstantial or personal – despite the fact that she described her institution at the time as failing:

> I mean being scared is not a reaction that is going to do much for the cause. I don't think it played much of a role in the development (of their vision and strategy) and I think that is an okay thing. ….. I don’t like to think that what we need to do is scare everyone to death. I don't think that fear is necessarily a state of mind that encourages positive thinking and future growth and all that kind of stuff. I honestly think that it is the reaction of people who feel very unempowered about their lives. You know it is like, well first I can convince myself that this too shall pass and then I realize this too is not going to pass..

On the subject of fear and creating tension by playing the role of devil’s advocate, another research participant said, “The president can incite ideas and make people uncomfortable. You want that tension, but you don’t want people to be too fearful or paralyzed.”

In general, presidents frequently spoke of their role in pushing the process and cajoling its participants. The president of a large, private, urban university who said (above) that he felt he needed to play a CEO-like role to drive the visioning operationally nonetheless stipulated that his ownership of the process did not mean it was strictly his vision. “It rolled out with the provost and the committee,” he said. In owning the process, he nonetheless believed that the vision could not be seen as strictly or even solely his vision. “The idea was not to put my face on it,” he added.

Interestingly, the leader of a medium-size, public, urban university also wanted to ensure that the vision not be seen as his alone. In opposition to the strategy used by one

of the presidents above, however, he sought to distance himself from driving the process and chose his provost and EVP to do so. He played key roles behind the scenes and made appropriate appearances throughout the process, but believed that he could not even be seen as driving the process let alone crafting the vision himself. By contrast, other presidents believed in "owning the process," in the words of one participant, but not being seen as having dictated the vision that emerged from that process.

Research Question #3

RQ3. What are the primary success factors that shape successful presidential roles in developing institutional vision?

This research question elicited some of the most interesting and powerful concepts from the presidents. By way of background, all the presidents maintained in qualitative and, therefore, subjective terms that their vision-development work was successful and impactful – in varying degrees. Having said this, they were certainly not reticent in criticizing themselves and offering lessons learned. This section of Chapter Four considers seven key role-based factors that the presidents believed contributed to their personal and institutional success in vision development or with which some of them wished they had done a better job.

Finding #13 – Underscored the importance of the vision-development process and their role in it: All presidents stated unequivocally that vision development and the strategic-planning activities of visionary intent were very important and ranked among their highest leadership priorities. The substance and tone of their responses seemed to validate that they took the work seriously and understood the need to be visible players in it. This was not assumed to be the case by the researcher at the start of this study. She has

worked with presidents in this context, but held in abeyance for the purpose of this study a view that some presidents do not take vision development seriously and substantively enough.

These 10 presidents have transformed or are transforming their institutions, however, and they all conveyed strong, purposeful visionary intent and vision-development processes as important means to that end. They also communicated a strong, unequivocal sense that their visible, ongoing roles in the process were essential if the work and its outcomes were to be taken seriously by their communities.

While presidents did generally seem to make vision development and the creation of visionary intent a high and visible priority for themselves, their frustration in having to remind colleagues of the need to do so inform this finding, as well. For example, this sentiment was reflected in the concern over lack of urgency by faculty members expressed by the chancellor in Finding #12 above.

All the research participants reported being visible in the process, though the president of a small, private, suburban university lamented in Finding #11 that he was not visible enough in heading-off those misguided “bandwagons” of unsustainable and untenable ideas before they gained too much momentum. On the other hand, at least one of the presidents may have arguably been too dominant and even domineering in his institution’s visioning process, though he did not admit to this conjecture on the researcher’s part. While it cannot be known in the context of this study, one could legitimately speculate here that he may have made vision development such a high

priority for himself and his participating colleagues and been so heavily engaged in the process that he stifled the contributions of key stakeholders.

The presidents understood that, by its nature, their singular leadership position required sustained visibility in the vision-development process and a constant reinforcement of its importance. The president of a small, private, rural college said, “I had to be very visible and very involved. People were not talking to each other here, and I needed to make sure that changed.” “I needed to set the tone,” the president of a small, public, rural college said adding:

> I had to be there, which allowed me to undertake course corrections without being an 800-pound gorilla. That’s because I was there frequently and knew the context and subtleties.

There is a fascinating phenomenon at play here concerning this point about importance and priority, however, and worthy of future testing. In the classic chicken-and-egg sense, did these turnaround institutions succeed because of their stated visionary intent (at least in part) and what it organized and unleashed or did the visionary intent seem to work in retrospect because of the success of the institutions’ turnarounds? Of course, institutional outcomes of the magnitude resulting from visionary intent are the products of complex multivariate processes involving many determinative factors beyond vision, such as leadership and employee talent levels, size and scope of budget, internal management practices, external economic conditions, timing, as one president indicated. Still, whether it be self-serving or objective fact, these presidents all believe their roles in vision and strategy development as well as the underlying strength of those visions and strategies, contributed significantly to their institutions’ success.

Finding #14 – Grounded vision development in the reality of institutional context: Several presidents spoke of the essential role of understanding the specific cultural and operational context of their colleges or universities prior to undertaking their vision-development initiatives. By this, they meant respecting an institution's past and present and incorporating into the vision and visioning process a demonstrated understanding of the specific realities of climate, relationships, politics, finances operating environment and history into their visioning processes. As one president noted, "It's all context. You have to understand the DNA of the place," this leader of a small, public, rural institution said.

The president of small, private, rural institution said – as did several other research participants – she used the visioning process to repair the culture, "Culturally, the place was not well. This (visioning) exercise brought us back together. It pulled the community back together. She also said that successful visioning means presidents and stakeholders must, "Put it in context of the current times" and "temper it with the reality at hand."

Just as the chancellor (above) warned against criticizing the past – publicly, at least – several presidents pointed to the positive uses of history as a best practice when it comes to organizational context. They said this was especially true in higher education, where histories, traditions, symbols and other cultural values, symbols and artifacts are highly regarded. In fact, the president of a medium-size, private, urban university purposely and purposefully used the rich, Catholic history and identity of his institution to set the context for his visioning work, motivate his participants to engage in an environment of appreciative inquiry deeply rooted in the university's values and origins.

Acknowledging the difficulty of using the past to look forward, he said, “We sought to be genuine and authentic in this century while also being faithful to these Catholic traditions.”

In the spirit of inclusion discussed above, however, this president also worried about the lack of inclusion for non-Catholics at his university and, in this case, in his vision-development work. “A few non-Catholics said, ‘We don’t want to be second-class citizens here,’” he added. In a skillful use of history, however, he promoted with his vision-development participants the fact that the theologian, writer and mystic at the center of his university’s history was originally a Protestant and was later welcomed into the Catholic tradition. He believed that nothing better captured the spirit of authentic inclusion and motivating context than this fact found in his own institution’s history.

The website for Harvard University’s Seminar for New Presidents animates the context point, by highlighting *The Context of Leadership* among its primary learning outcomes:

> The Context of Leadership explores the importance of the culture and traditions of an institution. How can the president be sensitive to organizational culture and the important traditions of the institution while encouraging and managing change?

Important aspects of context were stressed earlier in this chapter with that lone president who emphasized the need for context-setting market research in developing visionary intent as well as the chancellor and president who commented on the uses and misuses of institutional history. The president of a small, private, rural institution said with regard to context, “You have to be careful not to foist some vision that you had

coming to the door that maybe doesn't graft itself in the way it should to the institutional culture."

The president of a large, private, urban university spoke powerfully about the way in which he sensitively and adroitly understood his current context and seized the readiness of his people to reclaim their institution's greatness:

> I was the luckiest guy on the face of the Earth because I didn't have to convince anyone of the need for this vision. My predecessors suffered through it all. I walked into a great platform. We were pre-eminent from 1920 to 1970, and others rose faster out of the crap than we did. That was the glory period. And people really wanted it back. The vision statement was a no-brainer because it was their vision.

Another president illustrated how important it was for him to understand who he had followed as the university's leader, demonstrating another crucial aspect of context:

> We had no idea who we were because we had spent three decades, frankly, with (his predecessor) being the face of the university and never telling anybody what the plan was because there was no vision. Not an overt plan because I think (he) was a real believer that a plan is the product of small minds because it limits what you can do, right?

That president of a small, private, urban institution who chose to lead the visioning process both formally and operationally because of the previous "disasters" with it certainly demonstrated an acute understanding of context as it related to previous visioning and strategic planning episodes at her institution. She stepped into a day-to-day, operational role guiding the visioning that she might have otherwise given to one or more other senior officials. She said he intends to delegate in this manner the next time around.

All the presidents confronted context issues of a temporal nature as the performance of their institutions improved over time. These research participants all took

over mediocre, weak or even failing organizations. Several of them who have undertaken more than one visioning initiative at their institutions said that how they structured it the first time, when conditions were challenging, differed from how they subsequently approached the visioning process as conditions improved. The president of a medium-size, private, urban university said he was surprised to discover that he was leading very different institutions as conditions improved, his university evolved and the vision took hold:

> I have been president at about four or five places since I started here. ….. I began to see clearly that I was leading a different institution than I was leading five years before. That called on me to continue to refresh my sense of things.

The president of a small, public, rural college said her first visioning effort at her then-troubled college "was hardly the opportunity for a sweeping vision. The second time, I could get a little grander." She added, "I walked into a place that didn't believe in itself." So she reported changing how she engaged in vision development as her college recovered and revitalized. For starters, she reported delegating more the second time her institution undertook visioning and strategic planning under relatively calmer, less "survival-mode" conditions.

Finding #15 – Focused on the importance of language and defined key terms – up to a point: Most presidents commented in varied ways on the importance of language in successful vision development, referring to at least four very different aspects of this phenomenon. A few presidents maintained that it was essential to define the key terms in their visions and vision statements. First, some presidents spoke about the importance of their own use of language in their processes. One research participant represented the

view of several presidents in speaking about "the importance of language" and his careful, deliberate choice of words. He added, "I was measured in what I said about vision" early in the initiative, not wanting to be seen as exerting too strong an influence on the visioning process or outcome. For example, this leader wanted metrics tied to his institutions envisioned aspirations, but he spoke about approaching the concept and language of metrics carefully:

> We came up with a report card, okay. It was part of this process. If I had ever come in to this university and said, 'We are going to have a report card for everyone,' I might be thrown out. ….. So it was that kind of a dialogue and I would never allow myself as a leader of the institution to be put into position where it looked like I was pushing a report card. So I was thrilled and very happy when the committees decided we are going to measure it, we are going to measure our success and achieve the goals that we have set out to achieve. I mean, they asked for this, you know? They wanted data.

He added in the context of language and word choice, "I never told folks what to do. This was very much strategic on my part." Ironically, this leader was among the many who crafted his own vision of the institution before the larger, formal and community-based visioning exercise. As will be discussed later in the chapter, some presidents spent a great deal of time creating real inclusion as well as what might be thought of as the optics of inclusion. Often, in the latter case, they did so because they had already developed an institutional vision on their own and deemed inclusivity in the process as the best way to help their visions become reality.

Second, only two participants spoke about the importance of defining terms in the actual claims made in their vision statements and overall visionary intent, although this kind of precision would seem to be a very important consideration. The leader of a small, public, rural college said, "It's not enough to talk about academic excellence. You need

to define it. You need to define these terms." The leader of a medium-size, private, urban university said:

> The old English major in me led us to define these terms. It's there not to be glib, but to direct and inspire. We're throwing down the competitive gauntlet to ourselves, so all these words are key and have meaning, which must be a shared meaning. Yes the words are important and each word should mean something.

Indeed, this president who, like several other participants repeatedly stressed the need for "coherence" in and as a result of their visioning processes, specifically defined the elements within his vision statement. He said he did so in order to direct, inspire and unite his people. For example, his institution's *Vision 2020* brochure declares, "Let us amplify (our) vision statement." He pushed hard for the brochure and for the definitions therein, producing a document that defined vision-statement terms such as "premier," "independent," and "Catholic University. For example, in acknowledging the natural tensions between claims of independence and Catholicity, his brochure offers the following comment on his university's assertion of being independent:

> 'Independent' describes our legal status, of course – we are not owned or operated by the Catholic Church – but it also states without equivocation that we are an open institution deeply committed to academic freedom where students, faculty and staff of all faith traditions, or no faith tradition, are free to search for truth, beauty and goodness in teaching and in research, wherever that search may lead.

A third aspect of language emerged in asking the research participants to define and describe vision. Most every president expressed it as the formal portrayal of a future, desired state for their institutions. They did not generally dwell on or puzzle over this definitional aspect of their interviews because they understood and generally conveyed that, as one research participant said, "Vision concerns where we're going and mission

means how we'll get there." Their discussions of the "where" and the "destination" consistently echoed aspects the vision definition and concepts raised in Chapter Two.

The president of a small, private, suburban college said vision:

> Is a widely shared picture of how the organization will be different in the future than it is today. That is it. That is basically it. So that implies that people believe the picture and that they own it. Others have described it as not a picture, but a symphony lined up and coordinated, you know, but to me, what this really represents is a list of things that will be different in 2017 than they were in the fall of 2011. And so if you take them together, you can picture a different place than what exists today and that everybody in the process signed up to help achieve that change. And so in that you become closer as a team, the broad team. You get to know each other through the process. You learn about each other's concerns. You hear each other's voices. You work with people you wouldn't normally work with on a day-to-day basis. You develop relationships and then you go back and use operationally what you didn't have before.

The president of a very small, private, urban college called her institution's vision a BHAG, referring to Collins and Porras' (1996) term for "Big Hairy Audacious Goals" referenced in Chapter Two. She then described vision in a manner similar to many of the other presidents:

> The vision has to do with where the institution is going, in the distance. It seems to me that you have to have a sense of where you want to be and to build a roadmap. If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.

It is important to note, however, that only a few presidents added the action-compelling orientation of vision that constitutes the important, second half of this dissertation's chosen definition for vision in Chapter Two. To this end, though rarely to be found elsewhere in comments made by presidents, one leader of a small, private,

suburban college repeatedly said that vision is not useful unless it “inspires action and confidence.”

Interestingly, in presaging the Research Question #4 conversation as to whether presidents believe an institutional vision is (or should be) that of the leader, a consensus among stakeholders, or some hybrid of these two dimensions, the president of a small, private, rural college flatly defined vision as, “The timeless wish on behalf of the chief executive officer for the institution.” This question of “whose vision is it” presents a critical tension that will be explored later in this chapter.

Fourth, definitions and descriptions of vision by the research participants are largely shaped by the integration of visioning into strategic planning and strategy development, according to some presidents and as discussed above. This creates what one president called “a semantical jungle of terms” used in vision and strategy development. While all presidents understood the confusion and lack of precision among terms such as vision, mission, values, purpose, objectives, goals, commitments, directions, priorities and strategies, to name just ten operative terms in this regard, none of them chose to deal with the issue. “It’s a slippery slope for sure,” one participant said. Another added that taking the time to define these terms, however, “is just not worth it,” though this president did say that the volume of imprecise language in visioning and strategic planning is “a nightmare.”

In the context of this research, the five future- and destination-oriented terms most used by presidents in the interviews to convey vision and visionary intent, in whole or in part, start with “vision,” of course, but also include “commitments,” “directions,”

"priorities" and "objectives." All the presidents in this purposeful sample engaged in visionary intent to transform their institutions, some with and others without formal vision statements. They also used those last four terms a great deal as proxies for vision and visionary intent. The president of a large, private, urban university without a vision statement spoke about vision in terms of his institution's "ten commitments." The leader of a small, private, urban university with a formal vision statement also expressed her institution's visionary intent in terms of "five strategic opportunities."

In what starts to clear some of the "semantical jungle," however, the presidents readily removed terms from their discussions of vision and visioning that are more oriented to the present such as "mission," "values" and "purpose" and less focused on the qualities of a future destination found in definitions of vision. Still, the sense from the research participants is that they are generally fine expressing visionary intent as vision – sometimes in formal vision statements; sometimes not – as well as other words that capture the needed future orientation and action-inspiring motivation. In general, presidents acknowledged and understood this issue but do not seem willing to invest the scare time and resources to improve these semantics.

Finding #16 – Managed boards of trustees, skillfully and carefully: All the presidents said their boards of trustees were their most important stakeholder audience in terms of developing institutional vision and that their boards required extremely careful and delicate management. With a respectful eye on all key stakeholders, such as students, alumni, faculty, staff, parents, employers and opinion leaders, one president nonetheless flatly stated that, "In reality, the board's opinion counts more."

The presidents said they were leading their boards in the visioning process and/or shared with their boards a mutual commitment for the institution to engage in vision and strategy development. One participant who described himself as leading the board in this regard said, “The job of the president is to challenge the board with a vision.”

There were two general points of view, however, about the appropriate level of board engagement in visioning. A small number of presidents said boards should be tightly managed in this regard. These presidents expressed concern about two different types of board members. The first are over-zealous trustees who could make things difficult. And, conversely, the second are trustees who need in the words of one, “way too much hand-holding.” In this latter category, one president expressed concern about trustees “getting up to speed” and, in the words of another participant, “requiring a continuous education process.”

One president said the board of trustees under his predecessor “was a pretty suppressed group of people.” He said he used the visioning process to help re-engage and revitalize the board, offering that doing so has taken a great deal of work. In speaking about the uneven knowledge levels of his trustees, he addressed uneven motivation levels, too:

> Getting them to engage in something like this was part of a process of getting them much more knowledgeable about the University. They’re a very different group today than they were in 2005. We put in three, four years on academic program reviews so they now see at every meeting external reviews of two different academic programs. They’re seeing stuff that they just never saw before and we have conversations they never had before. So, they’re a much more educated group of people today than they were. And, you know, trustees in not-for-profits are very complicated people because they are sitting there with a range of motivations. There are some people that are really engaged in doing a lot of work and they are really working as trustees. There’s others

> that are very interested, but have full-time day jobs. You're not compensating them, so they are bailing in and bailing out. And then there's the other third sitting there because they thought it was interesting to be on a board, but they actually don't spend much time or put much thought or energy into it.

The presidents spoke of proactively marshalling the time of busy board members, both to respect their time and make best use of their capabilities as well as to create boundaries and keep trustees from becoming too deeply involved in the process. In several cases, this was achieved by appointing one board member with greater interest in or experience with vision development – and, perhaps, more time on his or her hands – to serve as the primary or sole board liaison to the entire process. In one case, as reported above, that board member and his firm actually helped staff the vision and strategy-development initiative on a pro-bono basis.

A few presidents spoke of the pitfalls of an over-engaged board. One participant said, "Boards tend to hold back administrations" but, in his case, "the board was deeply engaged and running ahead of the vice presidents" who were operationally driving the visioning process. He said that this kind of board exuberance can generally be dangerous, however, indicating that "we'll have to manage the board better next time and not give them the impression they're writing the thing."

Arguing against tactics designed to exclude board members or limit their roles in visioning, one leader of a small, private, suburban college represented the views of a majority of the research participants when he said:

> They (the Board) should experience the same visioning process as everyone else. It gives them a more realistic understanding of the experiences offered and received.

Indeed, one president supporting full board engagement in vision development suggested working with trustees first to calibrate their priorities and test their appetite for risk on a preliminary basis before embarking on a formal visioning initiative. Still, he implied that doing so was also an effective strategy for "keeping them on the rails," as if to keep them at some distance by drawing them in closer. He said this approach gave him a considerable advantage when it was time to present the vision and strategy to his board for their final approval.

All the participants said they presented their vision (statements) as an integrated part of their strategic plans to their boards although, as reported above, some of them had developed vision in the earlier, operational stages of the work and ahead of the start of formal strategic planning. All presidents reported that their boards approved the work with no or minimal resistance and changes. In every case, the participants conveyed considerable board enthusiasm for the new visions. Indeed, the president of a medium-size, private, urban university said his vision presentation was greeted with "a burst of applause."

In all these cases, the boards had chosen new presidents to transition and transform their institutions, which they have generally done. Boards seemed to have placed considerable trust in these presidents and given them adequate leeway to develop and execute a vision. Given the earlier discussion about context, however, the presidents seemed to understand how best to work with boards that suited their individual situations. Sometimes that may have meant keeping them at arm's length. The one exception to seemingly vigorous board support for these presidents' visions is the president who said she regretted that the lack of metrics in her visioning and strategic-planning efforts

reduced the impact of the vision and created subsequent concerns among trustees about how the vision could, should or would be implemented.

Finding #17 – Made connections between vision and strategic metrics: Many presidents said it is essential to connect their institutions' strategic-planning objectives, commitments and priorities to measurable outcomes. They did not argue, however, for attaching specific metrics to the overall vision or vision statements themselves. Presidents see vision as "setting the stage," "pointing us in the right direction," "less concrete" and "elevating our sights" as four of them said but, in their opinion, vision development comes too early in the process for it to be specifically linked to key measurements. The sense of the majority of participants is that vision inspires and informs the objectives and strategies that, in turn, require specific measurement. In commenting on the specific connection between institutional vision and operating metrics, one president said:

> It doesn't have to be measurable. Measurable is good. Measurable is great. But they don't have to be measurable; just concrete. And what concrete means is at the end of the period, if you look back, you will be able to tell whether you achieved it or not.

Again, this feedback comes despite the unequivocal view among presidents in favor of measurability and accountability in their overall strategic planning. It also comes with presidents' views here that setting and achieving measurable outcomes in strategic planning is indispensably linked to the real and perceived success of the vision and even the vision-development process.

In this regard, that president of a very small, private, urban institution lamented that she did not do an effective job "connecting the dots" among all the elements of vision, objectives, strategy and tactics in her institution's strategic plan (above). In retrospect, as her team's vision-development work translated into strategy, she believes

“we moved too fast. We’re still playing catch up here.” She connected the lack of measurable accountability in her strategic plan to the lack of understanding of her vision or confidence within the community that the vision could be achieved.

On the other hand, most presidents seem satisfied as to how their visions and visionary intent were linked to measurable outcomes within the overall body of their strategic plans, albeit not directly to the vision statements themselves. They see the establishment, communication, implementation and realization of performance metrics as boosting the credibility of their visions and, therefore, essential to the process of vision development as well as vision communication and vision implementation. The president of a large, private, urban institution spoke about the importance of metrics and the need to establish “early wins” in order to validate the vision and motivate the team in moving toward the vision, especially regarding highly ambitious visions:

> Galvanize and energize, that’s what a vision does. It has to be beyond your grasp or it’s not a vision. In our case, it was outrageous. We had so much to do. ….. So we put out our biggest deals and praised progress toward them. You hold up the unobtainable and praise the progress.

Another president echoed the need to craft possibilities for early progress into the development of the vision in order to motivate stakeholders. She said, “Celebrate the wins and let them know they are part of it.”

In speaking about the importance of metrics to the success of a strategic plan and, with it, the realization of a vision, one president said he focused intensely on creating an evidence-based culture at his institution and used the visioning process to do so:

> We are building this assessment culture, which you could only do, I think, ethically, if you have something to assess. And so if we are all clear about where we are, where we are going, and how we can get there, then you can set up the assessment ranging from the core curriculum to any part of student

> lift. Then you can say whatever we are doing, you have got something to compare it to, something that measures yourself.

It is worth noting, as well, that the culture of measurement and evidence has grown so substantially at this president's institution that the university is creating an Institute of Advanced Analytics modeled after the successful North Carolina State University model. "So here is something that wasn't foreseen in the original vision," this president said, "but it could very possibly turn into a school down the road once we see what the success is."

Several research participants reinforced the earlier point about the importance of language in visioning, but as it specifically relates to metrics. That chancellor who wanted "report cards" to measure progress against the vision knew that he could never actually use that term until, he reported, the faculty started using it on their own. Similarly, the president of a large, private, urban institution labored over whether to use business terms such as "margin" and "reserves" tied so closely to the aspirations expressed in his institution's vision. In fact, he felt he had no choice but to fight the resistance to such business-performance metrics found in higher education if his institution was to confront the reality of their condition and, ultimately, to survive, thrive and realize the vision. So, he used these concepts and terms throughout his vision- and strategy-development initiatives and found little or no resistance.

Several presidents said their institution's visions for academic excellence, for example, needed to be carefully aligned with the measurable reality of their academic quality. Many presidents expressed concern about "disconnects," as one called them, between claims made in their visions and the reality of those claims, how they are currently perceived and how they are to be measured. The president of a small, private,

suburban university who advocated for the benefits of market research in vision development said about improving his institution's image, "You have to enhance academic rigor if you want to enhance reputation." In his thinking, one cannot know the reality of academic rigor without measuring it nor the perceptions of academic quality without testing them with market research. In this sense, market research results benchmarked over time serve as their own type of metric. He added:

> "I hung tough on the academic rigor issue because research indicated that (his institution) was, in the words of a student blogger, a high school. Too many of our students thought the place was barely better than a high school.

Finding #18 – Aligned vision development with strategic initiatives: Some presidents reported linking their vision-development and related strategic-planning efforts to key initiatives such as reaccreditation, capital campaigns or master planning. In some cases, of course, accrediting agencies such as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) require institutions to have strategic plans and have reprimanded colleges and universities for the lack of vision, mission and strategic direction. The president of one university said, for example, that, "NEASC punished us for not having a mission statement." The leader of a small, public, rural institution added that, "The vision totally guided our NEASC work." The leader of a small, private, suburban college said that his institution's vision and strategic plan "was also really germane and exactly what the accreditation agents wanted to see."

Given that all the institutions in this purposeful sample had been struggling – if not failing – many of the links between vision development and reaccreditation were essential if not required. Still, the presidents in these situations said that the existence of

the external pressures of reaccreditation focused their visioning efforts and gave them added weight and impetus.

So too, many presidents integrated their visioning work with the development of their capital campaign or master-planning efforts. They said the energy, substance and tone of vision and strategy development helped inform and inspire other key milestones and initiatives. In one case, a president delayed the start of the quiet phase of his capital campaign in order to complete and then integrate the vision into that project. Another president said in this context, "We built our (capital campaign) case statement from the vision."

Finding #19 – Use the vision in major presidential decision making: Almost all the presidents said they make substantial use of the vision in their decision-making on key issues such as enrollment and fundraising. Questions on this subject were included in the Interview Guide as an additional means for exploring whether presidents took vision development seriously and deemed these tasks to be important. They did, resoundingly, at least according to their statements as well as their engagement in these questions and body language and tone of voice on the subject. One president virtually leapt out of his chair in response to these questions, perhaps inferring that the researcher had modest doubts about presidents taking visioning seriously. He enthusiastically offered that, "The vision is driving us. It's working. We don't take anything for granted."

The president of a large, private, urban university said in this regard:

> I use it (the vision statement) all the time. If you get one thing down, this is it. It's our BHAG. And I tell this same story all the time, but with different data. It keeps it unified and unifying. ….. You can't tire of telling this story. You do so to connect the vision to the reality of people's lives here.

A small, private, suburban university vision included “enhancing academic rigor.” Their president offered in this context that, with the right buy-in, vision and visionary intent inform and justify what leaders and organizations then choose to do and not to do:

> It’s helpful. You get buy-in. ….. Then, it’s a very powerful justification for doing the things you need to do next, if it’s done right and you have the buy-in. It becomes like the Bible. ….. If it’s done in a way that receives wide support from all constituencies and continues to derive benefits to the institution, every step you take thereafter does not have to be revisited, does not have to be thought about again, does not have to be retested. So we have already done that; we have already agreed that we need rigor not only for students but for faculty and staff as well and it was like, yeah, you’re right. So how do we encourage that?

The president of a different small, private, suburban institution added, “We were treading water and this was essential because the values are in there to help you decide what to do when decision-making is tough.”

The one president who said she is not using her institution’s vision as much as she had hoped was also the participant who expressed frustration about not having a strategic plan that connected the vision to measurable outcomes and placed the vision on a specific implementation path, such as the president immediately above said he possessed. It is worth remembering, as well, that she was the only research participant to use an external consultant to run the visioning effort on an operational basis. She regretted the situation and said, “I should be using it more.”

Research Question #4

RQ4. Do presidents believe their institution's vision should reflect their vision, a broader, inclusive vision incorporating opinions from many of the institution's stakeholders, or a hybrid of these elements?

This question presented some of the most interesting results in the study. In a sense, this fourth research question lies at the heart of the reality and perceptions of presidential roles in vision development. It could be informally summarized as, "Whose vision is it anyway?"

The question generated two primary responses. The first is the role that executive recruiters, boards of trustees, alumni, donors, opinion leaders and even the media play in asking presidents about their vision for the institution during their interviews for the job or at the time their new presidencies are publicly announced. This occurs long in advance of their first day on the job. This was a surprising finding to have emerged from the interviews of its own accord, since it was not raised by the researcher in the questioning. However, it seems to weigh heavily on the minds of these leaders as job finalists and, ultimately, as new presidents.

For example, that president of a large, private, urban university worried that trustees and recruiters are more fascinated by "outward charisma" and "the big vision" as they recruit job candidates than they are in hiring individuals well-equipped to manage large, complex organizations. Some presidents added that being seen as already possessing a vision prior to the start of employment can have deleterious implications for how the vision and visioning processes are regarded by leadership teams and stakeholders when the new president actually starts his or her job.

The second finding concerns whether presidents believe the institutional vision should largely or exclusively be their vision or some blend of their vision with visions offered by other stakeholders. A related and essential question becomes how best to create what appears to be a community vision whether the vision is born of a broader consensus or, in fact, largely that of the president?

Finding #20: Managed expectations to have a vision during the presidential search: Several presidents raised the critically important issue of having been repeatedly asked for their vision of the institution before, during and after their job interviews and long before the official start of their tenures. The presidents said they developed what one described as "coping mechanisms" for dealing with a question and expectation that another research participant said was "unwarranted" before they were selected for the position let alone had the opportunity to hear from their new leadership teams and stakeholders. In some presidents' views, this phenomenon worked against the benefits of an open, transparent and inclusive vision-development process discussed throughout this chapter.

There were two primary points of view expressed here. On the one hand, most presidents who spoke about this issue believed they were forced to offer fairly well-developed visions for their institutions during their job interviews because they would not otherwise have gotten the job. Many of them said they had to expect the question from recruiters and board members, so they prepared accordingly. The chancellor of a medium-size, public, urban university said:

> It's the process by which presidents are recruited. You know frankly I think before you go into a search committee for a presidential search you have to have a vision. ….. I spent five weeks talking to a lot of people, reading a lot and preparing for the interview at which time I

> developed a vision, but it wasn't a strategic plan. I developed a vision of what (his institution) needed, you know, for the next decade and I think that articulation of that vision to the search committee and then to the president of the system at the time resulted in me getting the job.

On the other hand, the president of a small, private, suburban college who came to his assignment from the business world said he resisted expectations for a "fully cooked" vision prior to assuming his position. He thought doing so was presumptuous on his part and that it would have a negative impact on his leadership team and stakeholders, whom he wanted to engage in an authentic collaboration around vision-development.

Instead, when pressed for a vision by trustees as he was interviewing for the position and once he accepted the position, and in contrast to the majority of presidents here who believed they needed to state their vision in advance of assuming office, he refrained from doing so:

> When I was being interviewed to be the president here, before I had been hired and when I first started, the most common question I got was, what is your vision for the college? And I refused to answer that question. I said the vision for the future of the college has to be the community's vision and not mine. To ask the most ignorant person in the room to state or create the vision for the organization will be inappropriate and dysfunctional. ….. I knew how to do strategic planning, but in terms of this college, what I knew about it was nothing and probably a lot of what I thought I knew was incorrect. And so every day, somebody asked me that question, reporters, people inside, people outside and I stuck to my guns. And I said, when we developed the plan and the day the board approved it, I stood up and said, 'Thank you for doing that because now I can answer the question that everybody asked me every day.'

One president reinforced the need to decline introducing a vision prematurely, especially under challenging circumstances. In interviewing for the presidency, she told board members at her failing institution that, "We have more important fish to fry" and, "We might not need a vision and strategy if we don't solve these financial problems." In

this case, context gave her the freedom to be honest with vision-seeking board members and to offer such candor successfully. She saw her job as helping to save the institution and to prepare it to envision its future from a position of relative strength.

In general, presidents seemed to have generated considerable momentum around personal visions for their new institutions as a result of the recruitment process. The vast majority of presidents offered some form of espoused vision at the hiring stage, because they were asked to do so and because they felt they had no choice. These research participants were then left with the question of what they did with those personal visions as they entered their organizations and whether and how tightly they held onto them through community-based vision-development and strategic-planning processes.

Finding #21 – Developed top-down vision while engineering bottoms-up buy-in: A majority of the presidents said their institution's formal vision was largely or exclusively their own. Many of them added, however, that they knew it was imperative to move their personal visionary intent through their teams and stakeholders in broad-based, collaborative processes in order for their visions to receive the needed buy in and earn the chance to be implemented and achieved. One can reasonably speculate that some or even a majority of the research participants enacted participatory leadership styles for the process of vision development and subsequent strategic planning – whether they believed in it or not – of necessity and in order to enact their versions of institutional vision.

A few presidents did encourage their institution's visions (and vision statements) to "bubble up" from "the grassroots," to use one participant's terms. They did not want to impose top-down visions on their communities. One of them said, in sharp contrast to the prevailing tendency in this finding for strong visions arrived at by presidents early (or

even before) their tenures, “Presidents kill institutions when they presume to have all the answers.” The leader of a small, private, rural institution buttressed this point of view, at least in part:

> I have heard many people talk about it. I have seen it myself, when a new president comes on board, they do want to hit the ground running. But you have to be careful not to foist some vision that you had coming to the door that maybe doesn’t graft itself in the way it should to the institutional culture. So, I think ultimately the vision does reside at the presidential level, but the president has responsibility to understand the mission and the culture of the institution to make the wisest decision and that vision isn’t just autonomous, it comes as a result of hearing a lot of voices. You can kind of absorb a lot of ideas and opinions coming up and I think graft an idea with your own creativity, but it has to be organic.

As is known from an earlier finding, one president even wrote her institution’s vision statement after the strategic planning was undertaken by a large task force. She then routinely and publicly pointed to the final vision statement as the result of her community’s collaborative efforts, despite the fact that she wrote it. Again, these views and approaches were in the minority among the research participants.

Nonetheless, most of the presidents indicated that they created a vision more unilaterally from the top down and then sought to achieve the desired buy-in for – and improvements in – the vision more communally as their strategic-planning processes rolled out. Where hybrid visions emerged for these top-down leaders, and in response to the “hybrid” aspect of Research Question #4, it seems to have taken the form a president’s vision coupled with his or her community’s strategic plan for achieving that vision in most (but not all) cases here. Indeed, the presidents who were more top-down in their approach to visioning seemed much more communal in their approach to the subsequent strategic planning, perhaps because they knew this was the only way to see their visions enacted.

The presidents with top-down visions in mind were very concerned about the optics. They did not want to be seen as having pre-set, top-down visions and forcing them onto their communities. Therefore, they were eager to engage in collaborative processes that incorporated large numbers of people into the socialization of their visions throughout their organizations and the communal development of strategic plans for implementing the vision. One president said:

> It (the vision) was my idea, but we needed to make it look like others' ideas. People want the grassroots, okay, but they need the president to lead.

The president of a large, private, urban university said his institution's vision did not roll out as his vision, though it generally was his vision:

> The trustees know it's my plan and they're my bosses. It's good they know that. I think the deans know the role I played. But overall, trying to sell the plan across the university was done by the provost. It was done by people from the committee. I did it at faculty assembly, which I chair, and in a couple of other places, but the idea was not put my face on it. I continually said that the huge challenge for this university was to get the president's face off the university, which (his predecessor) had stamped.

The chancellor of a medium-size, public, urban university underscored the difficulty in balancing the tension between expectations for visionary leadership on the president's part and equally pressing expectations to practice shared leadership in which the vision is crafted collaboratively. He echoed the sentiments of the presidents above in saying, "I can't be seen as building the vision. It's my vision, yes, but it's not something I was forcing on the faculty. I'm very sensitive to that.

The president of a small, private, urban university spoke similarly in this regard:

> I had these things (elements of the vision) in mind and this was an opportunity to put it all together. The truth of it all is that I laid it out. ….. I was very concerned that this was positioned as

> my vision. ….. We knew we had to vet it and legitimize it with the community so that it would work. ….. It being seen as my vision went away because of the process.

The president of a small, private, suburban college said some of his colleagues and key stakeholders wanted him to develop the vision because they were impatient with inclusive processes and suspicious of consensus-driven visions:

> They just hate process. You know, it fuels a little Jim Jones, you know, like drinking the Kool-Aid. It's forced conformity, because you are deciding all this by consensus.

Several presidents discussed the risks and benefits of advocating for personally derived visions that might be too bold and, therefore, not likely to be successfully introduced and enabled through their institutions because they would seem to be imposed from the top and too ambitious. That same president (immediately above) liked the boldness of his vision, believed it motivated his community, but then admitted to some degree of retrospective naiveté in its scope and feasibility.

> Our vision was a stretch. ….. The vision is your imagined future and unless you have an imagined future that you can believe in, you can't have hope. And if you don't have hope, you can't motivate them and so it's been amazing. ….. It reminded me of the computer HAL in *2001* (*A Space Odyssey*). After a while, it created itself, it took on its own energy and it continues to release imagination and creativity.

When asked whether he worried about the boldness of his vision in terms of its feasibility, this president added, "No. I should have, had I been a brighter person." Ironically, his professed naiveté over the plausibility of his own vision points to issues raised in Finding #11 about presidents' fiduciary roles in protecting their institutions against misguided ambition – potentially even their own, in this case.

This is why one of the small number of presidents in the study who did not offer their own vision and, instead, let it emerge from the process worried both about imposing

her vision on the organization as well as what she deemed to be the unnecessary grandness of a vision:

> This was hardly the opportunity for a sweeping vision. I walked into a place that didn't believe in itself. ….. Sweeping visions can only get you in trouble. We just needed to get everyone on the same page. The whole notion of grand, sweeping visions that a president has is dangerous. This is not my vision. It's our vision. ….. I would never stand in front of a group of people and say, 'I have a vision.' The shared governance model is the only way it works. ….. We all appear to be rowing in the same direction now. I helped set that up, but I didn't do it.

These two schools of thought contrast sharply with one another. The tendency of a majority of the presidents in this study might be characterized as "My Vision/Bold Vision /Engineer the Buy In" and the minority perspective might be labeled "Our Vision/Reasonable Vision/Buy-In Takes Care of Itself." Leaders in each of these two generalized categories seemed to have approached the vision-development process with what they perceived to be the best interests of their institutions as well as the values and approaches that made them successful and earned them their presidencies.

For example, the last two presidents referenced above sought to save, build and grow their troubled institutions. In this first case, the president promulgated a bold vision that he believed played a critical role in his university's turnaround and transformation. In the second case, however, the president refrained from developing a personal vision and resisted an especially bold vision as her institution sought to recover because she feared it would thwart their turnaround and damage her credibility.

Chapter Four Summary

Twenty-one separate but integrated findings emerged from in-depth interviews with 10 college and university presidents about their roles in institutional vision development. The findings described in this chapter are organized into four categories in response to each of the four research questions. These include what were described above as seven operating modalities relating to how presidents organize and prepare for vision development, 2) five specific presidential roles in visioning, 3) seven role-based presidential success factors across the entire process of vision development and 4) two substantive issues concerning balancing ownership of a vision between presidents and their communities.

In terms of this last specific "balancing" consideration – and this chapter explored many different types of balancing acts presidents confront – a majority of the research participants in this study designed visions of their institutions that were largely or exclusively their own. On the other hand, these presidents understood the risks of being seen as driving their personal visions through vision-development and related strategic-planning processes occurring in a shared-governance environment. So, with some irony, it seems they embarked on inclusive, community-wide visioning and planning initiatives because doing so was deemed the best way to achieve buy-in for their own personal visions. They otherwise let their communities exert much greater influence on the specific tenets of strategic planning once the vision was generally developed.

Of these 21 findings, five emerge as most important:

1. First comes the decision presidents make as to whether they choose to lead the visioning process themselves on a day-to-day basis or delegate that operational

duty to others (Finding #2). In this context, there are risks of both under- and over-delegating. This is the stage at which presidents signal the intensity of their involvement in the process and, given those choices, risk becoming too distant from it or too controlling of it. As will be reviewed in the next chapter, this study calls for presidents to be more rather than less involved in the operational dynamics of vision development, but to exercise caution in modulating their engagement so as not to be overbearing and silencing of others' opinions.

2. Next comes the relationship between encouraging creativity among staffs and stakeholders engaged in vision development (Finding #10) and balancing such ambition with realism and financial prudence (Finding #11). This relationship pits the challenge of asking people to stretch their thinking beyond business-as-usual boundaries with the requirement to exercise fiduciary responsibility. The view advanced in the next chapter is that there are very few times staffs and stakeholders are given permission to think big and to dream. Vision development is one of them. That opportunity should be encouraged, but presidents should remain vigilant about detecting, intercepting and modifying draft visions or inputs to vision that do not meet minimum standards of logic and feasibility – carefully and as early as possible.
3. Finally, Findings #20 and #21 speak directly to the most important question in this study – whose vision is it anyway? As it turns out, presidents are asked for their visions of the institutions they would like to lead during the job-recruitment process. How they respond to this question and manage the expectations it raises affects both their job prospects as well as how, in a system of shared governance,

they and others internally will view the vision-development process and participate in it. A blueprint for managing this question is offered in the next chapter. In general, a majority of the presidents in this study developed the outline of their visions exclusively or with limited participation of others – often buoyed by expectations during the job recruitment to have a specific and early vision in the first place. This phenomenon is explored more deeply in Chapter Five.

Summary by Areas of Convergence and Divergence

A broad resummarization of Chapter Four is also presented here, undertaken in two parts. The first part covers findings where there exists consensus or at least reasonable convergence among the presidents about best practices in vision development. The second component reviews areas of divergence where presidents disagree with one another about best practices, based on personal opinions, value systems, experiences and institutional contexts.

The convergent findings where presidents shared unanimous opinion include:

1. *Highest Leadership Priority*: Presidents stated that vision development and the strategic-planning activities of visionary intent were very important to them and ranked among their highest leadership priorities.
2. *Formal Leadership of Visioning*: Participants led their vision-development and, where applicable, related strategic-planning initiatives on a formal, titular basis.
3. *Trustees Most Important*: All of them said or implied that their boards of trustees were their most important stakeholder audience in terms of

developing institutional vision and that their boards required extremely careful and delicate management, for a variety of reasons.

4. *Inclusion Advocates:* They underscored the importance of their role in encouraging inclusion in the vision-development process as well as in being seen as advocating for inclusion.
5. *Personal Experience and Expertise*: Presidents believed their own experience and expertise were the most important factors in preparing them to lead vision-development and related strategic-planning work, although many other factors and techniques animated their engagement in and preparation for visioning.
6. *Varied Language and Semantic Issues*: Participants commented on the importance of language in successful vision development, though they raised many different points here from the need to define specific terms in their vision statements, e.g., premier, academic excellence or in their visioning processes, e.g., vision, mission, objectives, etc.

Areas with relatively convergent opinion where many or most research participants also agreed include:

7. *Relevant to Decision Making*: Most presidents said they make substantial use of the vision in their decision-making in enrollment management and fundraising.
8. *Integration with Strategic Planning*: Most of them incorporated vision development into their overall strategic-planning initiatives, often addressed at or near the start of such work.

9. *Creativity Desires and Fiduciary Responsibilities*: Some presidents said they encouraged their visioning participants to be creative and ambitious in their vision-development work while, at the same time, they said they felt the need to protect their institutions against misguided ambition and excessive creativity.
10. *Accountability and Urgency:* Many presidents emphasized their essential roles in driving the vision-development process, holding people accountable for results and cultivating a sense of urgency.
11. *Role of Context*: Many research participants addressed the critical need to understand the specific cultural, political, historical and operational contexts of their institutions prior to undertaking vision development, including the dynamics of whom they succeeded as president.
12. *Necessary Tone Setting*: Some of them stressed the need to set a positive, open and even-handed tone in their visioning processes and to model that behavior.
13. *Measurable Orientation*: Many participants spoke of the importance of connecting their institutions' strategic-planning objectives, commitments and priorities to measurable outcomes, but did not argue for attaching specific metrics to the overall vision or vision statements themselves. In this sense, vision derives strategy and strategy then requires measurability.

An interesting third area of convergent opinion relates to what seem to be important practices that were nonetheless raised by only one or two presidents:

14. *Market Research Role*: One president stressed the irreplaceable value of independent market research in preparing for and organizing vision development.
15. *Alignment with Major Initiatives*: Several presidents reported linking their vision-development and related strategic-planning efforts to key initiatives such as reaccreditation, capital campaigns or master planning.

Divergent feedback reflecting significant and interesting split opinions among the presidents include:

16. *Develop the Vision, Personally*: The majority of the presidents said that their institution's resulting vision was largely their own, though a significant and vocal minority of participants strongly maintained that it is inappropriate for presidents to make institutional vision their own without broad and authentic community input into forming that vision and some measure of consensus.
17. *Design the Process, Communally*: Every one of the majority of presidents who said that the final institutional vision was exclusively or largely their own, nonetheless created broad community-engagement processes for socializing their vision through their organizations, enabling staffs and stakeholders to opine about the vision and even modify it, and to pursue all subsequent aspects of strategic planning on a more communal basis. Still, this process of engineering buy-in for a president's pre-existing vision was anathema to a minority subset of the research participants.

18. *The Vision Question at Recruitment:* Most presidents raised the issue of having been asked for a vision of their institutions before, during and after their job interviews and long before the official start of their tenures. The majority of presidents offered such visions at this recruitment phase, though a minority said they would not do so.
19. *Outside Expertise*: A slight majority of the presidents utilized external consultants or facilitators to assist with their visioning initiatives. Those who did so, all stated that they knew and trusted these outside agents.
20. *Day-to-Day Direction*: Half the presidents asked other senior officials to direct the actual visioning work on an operational, day-to-day basis while the other half operationally directed the process themselves in addition to their more formal, titular roles.
21. *Vision Statements*: Four presidents said their institutions do not actually have formal vision statements, with several participants outright rejecting the utility of brief, codified vision statements for complex institutions of higher education.

Whether emerging from convergent or divergent opinion among the research participants, many of these findings seem to require presidents to balance between two competing tensions. This might include, for example, developing visions unilaterally or consensually, acquiescing to expectations that presidents provide visions before they are (and as part of being) hired or choosing to wait until their communities can be included in the process, or championing ambition and creativity in vision development while protecting the institution against visions that are untenable, misguided or even dangerous.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Discussion

This chapter covers five dimensions:

- First, the 21 findings are summarized in Table 5 below in response to each of the four research questions.
- Second, some of the findings are then examined through the lens of applicable literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This examination produces four scholarly conclusions with implications for theory.
- Third, the author answers the research questions in her own voice, combining the presidents' feedback with her experience and expertise to offer numerous implications for practice. She arrives at many best-practice conclusions about how presidents should engage in vision development. She also offers six summary implications presented as balancing acts that presidents should consider undertaking to engage in vision development effectively.
- Fourth, some areas for potential future research are identified and aligned with each of the four scholarly conclusions.
- Finally, concluding remarks are offered that place this study in context and underscore its value and significance.

Summary of Results

This section of Chapter Five summarizes the findings by each of the four research questions governing this study. Each finding is specifically responsive to its research question. By design, however, each finding also transcends its applicable research question and applies to most or all the other questions, as well. In this sense, the 21

findings answer the meta-question of how college and university presidents best engage in formal institutional vision development.

Table 5 – Summary of Results

Research Question	Findings
RQ1 – How do presidents organize and prepare for vision-development processes?	Finding #1: Led visioning initiatives on a formal, titular basis. Finding #2: Appointed other senior officials to direct the day-to-day visioning work. Finding #3: Utilized outside experts to inform and assist with the visioning process. Finding #4: Incorporated vision into strategic-planning initiatives. Finding #5: Developed formal vision statements – or not. Finding #6: Incorporated market research into vision development. Finding #7: Prepared in varied ways, but relied on personal experience and expertise.
RQ2 – What roles do presidents ascribe to themselves in developing institutional vision?	Finding #8: Advocated for inclusion of key stakeholders in the process. Finding #9: Set an appropriate collaborative tone for vision development. Finding #10: Encouraged ambition and creativity among stakeholders. Finding #11: Protected against misguided ambition and unsustainable visions. Finding #12: Drove the visioning process while conveying a sense of urgency.
RQ3 – What are the primary success factors that shape successful presidential roles	Finding #13: Understood importance of vision-development process and their role in it.

in developing institutional vision?	Finding #14: Grounded vision development in the reality of institutional context. Finding #15: Focused on the importance of language and defined key terms. Finding #16: Managed boards of trustees, skillfully and carefully. Finding #17: Made connections between vision and strategic metrics. Finding #18: Aligned vision development with strategic initiatives. Finding #19: Use the vision in major presidential decision making.
RQ4 – Do presidents believe their institution's vision should reflect their vision, a broader, inclusive vision incorporating opinions from many of the institution's stakeholders, or a hybrid of these elements?	Finding #20: Managed expectations to have a vision during presidential search. Finding #21: Developed top-down vision while engineering bottoms-up buy-in.

Four Scholarly Conclusions

Four scholarly conclusions drawn from the literature emerge from these 21 findings, especially when viewed in concert with some of the most compelling points of convergence and divergence among the presidents' opinions. The conclusions offered in this section are the four most interesting and potentially productive in terms of scholarship and research. They each respond to specific research questions in this study as noted below and include implications for theory. The four conclusions are:

1. *Vision-Development Parallels with Leadership Theory*: There are interesting and useful parallels between presidents' roles in vision development and the overall evolution of leadership theory. Presidents engaged in effective vision development undertook approaches and worked within contexts that seem to borrow from several leadership theories at the same time. This hybrid orientation merits theorizing and future research.
2. *Value of Being Bold and Early*: Most of the research participants developed institutional visions that can be characterized as being bold and undertaken early in their vision-development processes, finding sufficient though not universal support in the literature.
3. *Need for Understanding Context:* Most of the presidents spoke in varied ways about the essential need to understand institutional context prior to embarking on vision-development exercises. This point finds widespread support in the literature.
4. *Inadequacies of Two Prevailing Narratives:* Presidents face considerable skepticism about the state of U.S. higher education today and concomitant claims about the demise of the college presidency. These factors could have serious implications for the ability and willingness of presidents and their staffs and stakeholders to engage effectively in vision development, though this proposition requires considerable theorizing and research because it does not appear to be addressed in the literature.

Conclusion #1: Vision-Development Parallels with Leadership Theory

This conclusion is directly responsive to Research Question #4, although it informs answers to all the research questions in this study. Indeed, the question of "whose vision is it anyway?" is central to this examination, as is how and why presidents make specific choices about both the product and process of vision development at their institutions. Opinions on this subject reveal interesting points of intersection with leadership theory itself. Any understanding of a possible future theory of vision development will be enhanced by considering the leadership theories and contexts from which vision development seems to borrow.

On the one hand, most of the research participants as well as the people who hired them and are led by them seemed to expect a level of decisive, top-down and pre-ordained vision from these presidents. Most of the presidents operated within this framework, at least when it came to developing a vision for their institutions. One can reasonably speculate in this context that expectations for centralized, top-down presidential visions could owe to the assumptions people make – however unrealistic – about the positional power granted to presidents as well as these leaders' charisma, intelligence, wisdom, track record and presumed abilities to understand and shape events.

On the other hand, an important minority of the research participants chose to adhere more closely to the principles of shared governance, underscoring that college and university stakeholders expect open, inclusive processes. They acted in an opposite manner than the majority of research participants by embracing key attributes and expectations of Shared and Servant Leadership Theories (Greenleef, 1977; Buchen, 1998; Bennett, 2001; Dennis, 2004; Smith, 2004). After all, many faculty members would

undoubtedly agree that presidents should perform as servant leaders to and for them and resist the idea that they and they alone possess the insight needed to formulate institutional vision. Indeed, the three case studies referenced in Chapter Two all reinforced the reportedly critical role of inclusion and even consensus in vision and strategy development, which certainly reflects the democratic impulses found in Shared and Servant leadership theories.

In stepping back from these competing tensions, however, it is clear that all the presidents in this study operated in the context of Contingency or Situational Leadership theories (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977; Hersey, 1985; Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Northouse, 2012). As it turns out, a majority of them centralized the product of vision development while decentralizing the process of vision development. A minority of them decentralized both the product and process of vision development. They each approached vision development situationally in ways they believed offered the best chance of success in their particular environments, given their distinct views about the importance of shared governance and, in Hersey and Blanchard's (1977) formulation, their perceptions of the "maturity" or readiness of their staffs and stakeholders to engage productively in vision development.

It is interesting to speculate that while some of the presidents displayed what seemed to be authentic participatory leadership styles to achieve both the product (vision) and process (vision development), others appeared only to embrace participatory styles for the process as a necessary means for enacting the product – their own institutional visions.

Implications for Theory

An interesting theoretical implication here concerns whether it is possible that these presidents each found a productive equilibrium in vision development between expectations to have all or most of the answers and countervailing expectations for never daring to suggest they have any answers. In arriving at such a contextually and situationally appropriate equilibria, and in actualizing their own opinions about how wide to open the lens of inclusion at their specific institutions, they all seemed nonetheless to be working within the Contingency and Situational model. They adapted to need and circumstance whether the resulting products and processes of vision development were more or less open and democratic and whether their path to equilibrium was consciously derived or not.

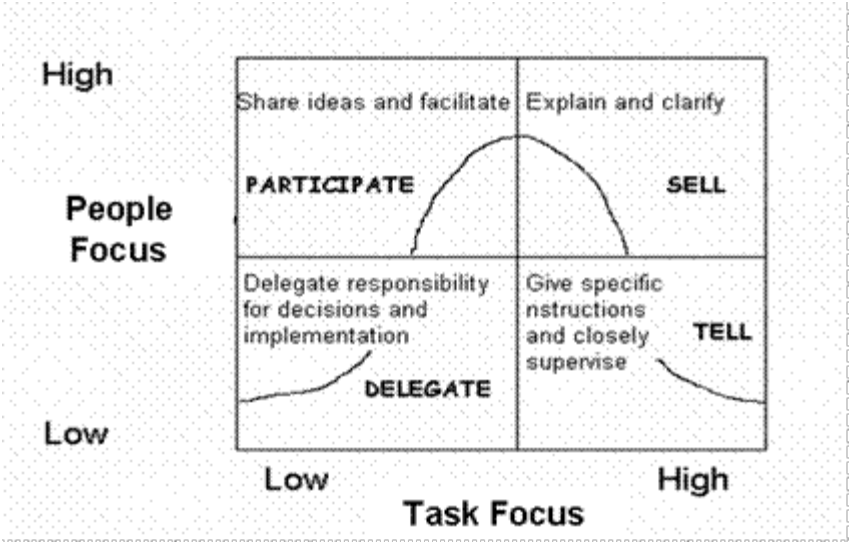
The Hersey-Blanchard (1977) Situational Leadership Model presented four leadership styles on display among these presidents. According to the authors, the "Telling" and "Selling" styles focus on getting *tasks* done while the "Participating" and "Delegating" approaches maintain more of a *people* focus and are concerned with developing team members (Figure 2). The latter approaches are far more consistent with the ideals of shared governance found in higher education.

For the process of vision development and subsequent strategic planning initiatives, all the presidents appear to have operated in the upper-left PARTICIPATE quadrant of Figure 2. As stated earlier, however, there is sufficient reason to assert that some of them did so only out of necessity – as a means to an end – and not with true participatory convictions.

A minority of the presidents in this study also operated in the PARTICIPATE domain to develop the product of the actual vision, too. Notably, however, a majority of them developed their own visions in the TELL and SELL modes though, again, some of these approaches appear to have been cloaked in participatory orientations.

Using the Hersey and Blanchard model as a summary device, three types of situational leadership styles seem evident here among all the research participants: 1) a minority of presidents who utilized the PARTICIPATE approach to develop both the product of vision and process of vision development, 2) a majority of presidents who combined the TELL and SELL approaches to create the product of vision while working in the PARTICIPATE domain to engage in vision finalization and subsequent strategic planning, and 3) a large subset of this latter group who, arguably, appeared only to embrace the PARTICIPATE style for the process of vision development because they believed it was necessary to do so to codify the visions they had in mind for their institutions and achieve the required buy-in among staffs and stakeholders.

Figure 2: Hersey-Blanchard Situational Leadership Model



Despite taking varied approaches to vision development, the presidents also understood the centrality of vision to effective leadership in complex environments. As was discussed in Chapter Two, Complexity Leadership theorists (Dreachslin et al., 1994; Collier & Estaban, 2000; Englehardt & Simmons, 2002; Styhre, 2002; Cooksey, 2003; Simpson, 2007; Skarzauskiene, 2010; Borzillo & Kaminska-Labbé, 2011) returned vision and the leader role in its creation to a place of prominence that it had enjoyed in Transformational Leadership Theories (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Sashkin, 1995, Yukl, 1999; Hauser & House, 2000; Smith, 2004) but subsequently lost in the diffused, distributed environments of Shared and Servant Leadership.

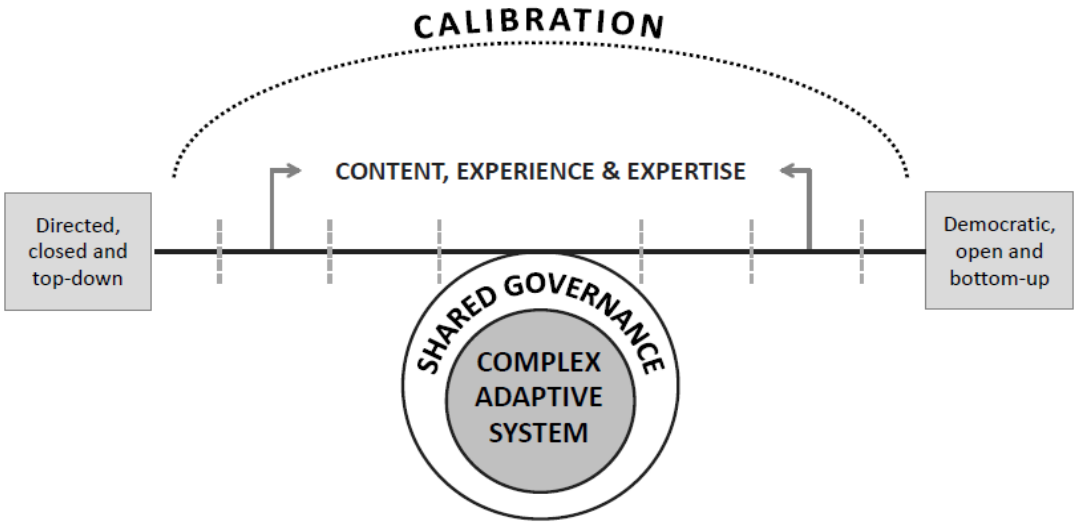
These presidents seemed instinctively to have embraced Youngblood's (1997) formulation for "quantum organizations" and vision, which he wrote was essential for "establishing context" in complex adaptive systems. Youngblood and others argued that for such systems to succeed a strong sense of vision needed to return to the discussion of leadership theory. This assertion helped address concerns about the possible lack or loss of vision stemming from matters of "self-organization" and "operating far from equilibrium" that are central to Complexity Leadership Theory.

Youngblood indicated that vision is an essential glue that holds organizations together on the edge of chaos where, "through shared beliefs and intentions, people are able to act autonomously and remain in accord with the whole – thus drastically reducing the need for external controls. This is an area that bureaucratic organizations typically ignore" (p. 11). As he put it, and as most of the research participants in this study seemed to embrace, "A strong, well-understood, core ideology is vital to a quantum organization (p. 11). These presidents were determined to shape it. Their critics from among the

minority of research participants might say they were too willing to shape it – in their own likeness.

It is argued here that all the research participants were working within a Contingency and Situational Leadership framework, calibrating their specific, individual approaches based on institutional and situational context as well as their own experience and expertise. In doing so, as illustrated in Figure 3 below, each of the presidents found specific, separate points of equilibrium for both the *product* of vision and the *process* of vision development between directed, closed and top-down approaches on the one hand and democratic, open and bottom-up orientations on the other hand. Furthermore, it is asserted here that they were engaged in these individual calibration exercises – however consciously or not – while operating on the foundation of complex adaptive systems enveloped by environments of shared governance common to higher education.

Figure 3 Vision Development Decision-Making Framework



The presidents all used vision and vision development to succeed in the dynamic, non-linear environments of complex adaptive systems, understanding the need in Complexity Leadership for clear, compelling visions that help cohere and unify contemporary organizations. This is a context-dependent, individually calibrated approach to vision development that borrows from several leadership theories. It merits additional theorizing and could well inform creation of an overall theory vision development.

Conclusion #2: Value of Being Bold and Early

Research Question #4 is arguably the most important of the questions in this study, by design. It presented the most difficult question in the study; the answers to which are central to revealing how presidents really engage in vision development. The value of being bold and early in visioning arises as a priority in this context.

There is support in the literature for presidents to seek to develop visions that are bold and created early in their tenures. As proxies, both of these impulses support and even encourage a strong presidential role in vision development and are, therefore, of interest to theorizing and research in this area. Both the bold and early orientations support the views as well as the actions of the majority of the research participants as well as what Complexity Leadership theorists contend is the role of strong vision in keeping complex adaptive systems focused and unified.

Implications for Theory

Trachtenberg (2008) advised trustees and presidents that, “You can’t drive an institution without a leap of faith – sort of what like you have in religions. In other words, you have to believe in the unproven” (p. 43). Several of the research participants spoke of

such leaps of faith in their own visioning work. They described their own uneasiness, fears and even naiveté in developing and sponsoring visions that were regarded by some as considerable stretches – even stretching credulity and credibility. Still, many (by no means all) of them seemed to understand Trachtenberg's proviso here and believed that their institutions required visionary boldness.

A few presidents said financial realities required them to temper the boldness of their visions, however, which finds itself at odds with Trachtenberg's contention above as well as the opinions and actions of the research participants. This points to a useful theoretical implication of this work since, for example, Hamel and Prahalad (2005) argued that an organization must reconcile its purpose with its means, producing visions that balance ambition and realism. The authors accepted and encouraged bold visions, but they argued to do so realistically. They suggested that thinking in terms of balancing ambition with realism "implies a sizeable stretch for an organization" (p. 6), but that doing so is central to developing and ultimately realizing meaningful visions.

Hamel and Prahalad's assertion echoes the views of that one president in this study who said his institution's preliminary vision statement was so ambitious that it was untenable and risked being financially and even reputationally dangerous. He said that he was detached from the vision-development process and, as such, was not as available as he believed he should have been to temper misguided ambition early and without dampening enthusiasm. Overall, Percy et al. may have summarized this aspect of vision development best in writing that, "Institutions must ensure that they have the pocketbook for their aspirations" (p. 224).

A significant conundrum here comes with theorizing about how far beyond practical and financial limits presidents should push their boldness. And how would they know they have gone too far in this regard, anyway? After all, presidents in this study wanted their people to stretch creatively and exhibit ambition for their institutions and themselves. So, what is the nature of the relationship between prudence and ambition in this regard? One can surmise that vastly ambitious presidents and visions might be reckless. On the other hand, however, are vastly prudent leaders and visions incapable of catalyzing and rallying organizational transformation? If so, might such conservatism produce its own from of recklessness? One gets the sense from several presidents of substantially transformed institutions in this study that they would not have been so bold but for their naiveté and inexperience. Yet, their efforts seemed to work. What might have happened to their institutions had more prudent visions been at play?

Conclusion #3: Need for Understanding Context

This conclusion is directly responsive to Research Question #3. Unlike the two previous scholarly conclusions – the parallels and points of intersection with leadership theory and the dynamics and disputes of being bold and early – the importance of understanding context in vision development seems to be without sharp differences of opinion or controversy in either the literature or among practitioners. This issue starts with the important matter of context that concerns achieving the right fit between a president and his institution. This issue is more the domain of trustees and executive recruiters. Of course, context also includes the need for presidents to understand the specific cultural, historical, political, operational and financial natures of their institutions prior to vision development and to adjust their approaches and expectations accordingly.

Implications for Theory

Deep understanding the fit that may or may not exist between a leader and his or her specific context evokes tenets of Contingency and Situational Leadership Theories (Hersey, 1985; Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Northouse, 2012), addressed above. These thinkers explored the relationships between leaders and their particular situations. Scholars here believed that effective leaders' success depended upon their social environments and operating contexts. Perhaps these beliefs can be applied to achieving a better understanding of effective visions and vision-development processes, too, given the direct evidence of the situationally appropriate choices the presidents in this study made to calibrate the product of vision and the process of vision development to match their perceptions of their specific environments.

Fiedler and Chemers (1974) worked on one aspect of this approach when Situational and Contingency Theories were extant. Their Leader-Match theory attempted to align leaders with situations and circumstances that best suited them. Northouse (2004) referred to this approach as contingency, "because it suggests that a leader's effectiveness depends on how well the leader's style fits the context" (p. 109). It is interesting to ask whether the research participants in this study were effectively matched by trustees and recruiters to their specific contexts and how that matching process transpired. It is useful to theorize whether the visions offered by the presidents helped trustees and recruiters know whether these candidates truly understood their specific situational contexts and their likely fit with their new organizations. Of course, this assumes that the trustees and recruiters truly understood those contexts themselves, which may not always be a safe

assumption. These considerations all have potential implications for future theories of presidential vision development.

Conclusion #4: Inadequacies of Two Prevailing Narratives

This discussion may not seem to have direct bearing on the research questions or possible theoretical implications, at least on the surface. Quite the contrary! This conclusion applies to all four research questions, as something of a meta-consideration. That is because a rather dire picture of U.S. higher education emerged from the Literature Review and in some of the interviews. While this state of affairs does not appear to have been researched, it can be reasonably conjectured that this growing wall of negativity about higher education today must have enormous implications for the ability and willingness of presidents and their staffs and stakeholders to engage in vision development, let alone implications for their professional and institutional identities.

Specifically, this point concerns two overarching narratives that dominate the higher education literature and arguably create ever-more challenging (and perhaps emboldening) contexts for presidents to engage in vision development. The first is the widespread purported decline of higher education in the United States (Lewis, 2006; Menand, 2010) and the view that the sector requires massive disruption and application of business discipline to survive and thrive again (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). The second and related narrative concerns the consistent lament over the decline of the college presidency itself and the loss of the "great men" who once led our institutions of higher education (Greenberg; 1998; Dennison, 2001; Nelson, 2007).

Implications for Theory

The marketing of arguments about the decline of U.S. higher education and demise of the college presidency has become a cottage industry today. This observation presents major possibilities for theorizing. For example, Selingo (2013) wrote that, "American higher education is broken," labeling it a "risk-averse, self-satisfied industry" (p. x). The 10 presidents in this purposeful sample seem anything but "self-satisfied" and the institutions they are leading anything but "broken." This is not to deny the many serious challenges to be found in higher education today, and at these 10 organizations, but the track records of these presidents and institutions would seem to support those who are countering these abundant negative portrayals such as Duderstadt (2010) and Bok (2013). Of course, the presidents in this study represent success stories and their institutions are not necessarily emblematic of the path of many U.S. colleges and universities today. Nonetheless, legitimate questions abound concerning the world views and underlying motivations of the not insignificant number of scholars and practitioners promoting the demise of higher education.

Additionally, with regard to the demise of the college presidency, the 10 participants in this study do not seem to represent "small men on campus" or notions of the "shrinking college president" advanced by Dennison and others. Indeed, the enormous complexity of leading through the Great Recession of 2008-2010, as all of these research participants did, and engaging in vision development underscores a key point made by Bruininks et al. (2010). They argued that these recent years of economic, financial and enrollment upheaval placed an even greater premium on presidents who are willing and able to develop animating, differentiating and, yes, bold visions as well as inclusive vision-development processes designed to galvanize their communities.

Bruininks et al.'s theories find considerable support in the case examples of the research participants in this study.

Implications for Practice

Best Practice Answers to the Research Questions

The presidents offered many different views about vision development and took some decidedly different paths in designing and implementing it. Not surprisingly, despite the fact that their views and approaches contradicted one another in key instances, they nonetheless held strong opinions on the subject. So, what are the best answers to these research questions that can help to guide presidents engaged in vision development?

How to Organize and Prepare

The first research question asks how presidents organized and prepared for their vision-development processes. Presidents should lead visioning on a formal, titular basis, as every one of the research participants did. Imagining the future of their organizations is a serious strategic challenge and requires a visible, engaged leadership presence. This is not the occasion for a laissez-faire relationship with the process. Having said this, a few presidents appeared overly engaged in the effort and risked stifling the input of their staffs and stakeholders. One is left to wonder whether that president who ran the entire visioning and subsequent strategic-planning initiative – and believed he had to do so, given his expertise – actually achieved the best results.

Presidents should carefully assess the impact their presence has on this (or any) internal process. In that spirit, presidents should lean heavily in the direction of delegating leadership of the day-to-day components of vision development (and strategic planning) to key lieutenants on their executive management team. Presidents should

distribute this operational leadership responsibility to two very senior people, ideally representing academic and administrative interests. The medium-sized, public, urban institution in this study represents a model that seemed to have worked well. Nobody doubted that the chancellor there was in charge of visioning, so he capitalized on that strength to name his provost and executive vice president co-chairs of both vision development and subsequent strategic planning. Unlike the one president referenced above, he was not dominating or stifling the process and yet, as with another one of the presidents in this study, neither was he so disengaged from it that untenable visions risked being crafted without his knowledge and intervening role.

Some presidents named only one person to manage the process operationally, which would also seem to risk choking off contributions and creating resistance. After all, the academic community will feel left out if that one person is an administrator and vice versa. Plus, what if that one person is somebody not liked and/or respected by the community? How would the president even know this in the first place? Indeed, naming co-chairs from academics and administration can build a needed bridge between these two domains and signal that vision development is a shared strategic and creative requirement. Plus, remember that one president who lamented how he was lied to by a vice president in charge of key segments of the visioning and strategic-planning processes? It is advisable that presidents limit this risk by not giving just one person complete control of the process.

Utilizing outside experts to shape and guide the process is also advisable. However, presidents in this study made mistakes here, too. One research participant was right to regret that she placed too much power in the hands of that external agent and was

left with a flat vision and a strategic plan without the means to measure achievement of that vision. Another president said she retained a board member's management consulting firm to lead parts of the process, which seems too insular and even problematic a course of action. A third president spoke of the nightmare of the outside expert falling asleep during a presentation, which did serious damage to her predecessor's visioning efforts and credibility.

Outside experts should possess proven track records in both vision development and strategic planning. Yes, it helps if they are known to and trusted by the president in some manner; perhaps he or she successfully worked with them in the past. However, they cannot be seen as having too close a relationship with the president so as to damage their independence and credibility, and they most definitely should not be placed in charge of the process. Instead, they should work for and report to the operational co-chairs discussed above.

Vision development should occur at the start of an overall strategic-planning initiative, which was the case at most of the institutions represented here. However, it should maintain its own independent approach, strategy and timetable lest it be too quickly consumed and otherwise co-opted by the more practical and technical requirements of much larger strategic-planning processes. Creative imagining must be cultivated and given its own time and space.

Formal, objective market research should be incorporated into both vision development as well as strategic planning. Only one president raised this issue, but he was certainly correct in doing so. An impression was created by these presidents that market research was not an essential feature of their vision-development work, perhaps

because they believed they already knew what was right for the institution or what stakeholders thought and felt, they did not want to invest the time and money, and/or they did not want to be forced to report on the results of the research and then live with its consequences. To the contrary, presidents are urged to undertake primary and secondary research to overcome the natural insularity that besets higher education institutions because doing so is essential for stretching the imagination and crafting creative visions that might otherwise be suffocated by the day-to-day reality of running the institution. Plus, it seems markedly difficult to create and navigate a future destination without well-informed and independent assessments of current status and course.

Roles in Vision Development

Presidents ascribed many vision-development roles to themselves. Advocate for inclusion was chief among them. This is a tricky proposition in at least two ways. First, they have to mean it and actually feel passionate about cultivating a reasonably open, inclusive environment for vision development. One developed the sense, instead, that some of these presidents appeared to embrace inclusion because they saw it as a necessary and practical strategy for achieving buy-in to their visions. That makes sense, of course, but the risk here is that staff and stakeholders will see this for what it is – a desired rubber stamp. The strategy of developing a vision for the institution personally while opening the process of visioning and strategic planning more widely to the community will be discussed later in this section and chapter. It is the approach most presidents took here. For the moment, however, suffice it to say that the call for inclusion must be authentic and cannot be perceived by the community as a mere pro-forma exercise.

The second aspect of inclusion is a more practical one concerning the type and number of participants in the vision-development process. Presidents should include a variety of portfolios, perspectives and experiences from across the campus in vision development, so as to benefit from the healthy tensions these voices bring to the process. The countervailing point as acknowledged by some presidents, however, are the pitfalls of having too many people involved in the process to the point where it risks becoming unmanageable. The right number of individuals engaged in vision development will depend upon the size and complexity of the institution and the presidents comfort level in this regard. There is no right answer here, but something approximating the 10-15 people on a president's cabinet seems plausible. A draft vision can certainly be vetted with and refined by much larger numbers of people as the strategic-planning process unfolds, but the initial number of people actually crafting vision – or reacting to and adjusting a president's draft vision – should be kept small.

This is where market research can also help. Survey research and/or focus groups can enjoin staffs and stakeholders in a process without having to invite them formally and physically into the proceedings. A subtle but essential point here is that while efforts should be made to review and even incorporate the opinions of individuals directly and through research, the presidents in this study remind us that a consensus vision is not the desired outcome. Inclusion and the expectations for consensus that it triggers can be antithetical to developing clear, sharp and differentiated visions. People need to be included in vision development or even vision refinement directly, through market research, and later in the process as strategic-planning participants. At the same time, however, they need to be reminded that while all voices will be heard and respected, only

a few of them will actually see their opinions reflected in the new vision. The presidents duty here is to explain why this is the case and, perhaps, to harvest some of the more constructive and appropriate points raised in visioning for possible use in subsequent strategic planning.

The second major role presidents reported playing concerned the twin requirements to encourage creativity and ambition among their vision-developing colleagues while ensuring that no misguided or untenable draft visions gained too much traction internally. Presidents should not be reluctant to ask the right number and type of people engaged in the process to stretch far and wide in their thinking about institutional vision. They should help these colleagues keep at least one eye on the long-range future, too, echoing the difficulties that one president said she and her team had in balancing short- and long-term orientations.

After all, vision development delivers among the precious few occasions in the leadership of higher education institutions to rise above day-to-day, short-term matters. It should be seen as a cherished moment when colleagues can think big and think differently without fear of rejection or recrimination. This is why it is so important, however, to keep this initial visioning team relatively small and to enable them to dare to be different. That one president was right in saying she wanted her team to be as imaginative as possible, knowing that she could correctly guide such deliberations and subsequently adjust the draft visions as needed. Otherwise there would be no other point in time to stretch a team's thinking beyond normal operational boundaries. The key is to stay engaged in the process so as not to be surprised by what eventually emerges, reflecting the concern expressed by that one president who regretted being disengaged

and unable to deal with bad ideas that had gained momentum. Besides, given all the claims about the systemic troubles facing higher education these days, this would seem to be exactly the right moment to ask people to help reimagine the future of both their institutions and their professions.

Success Factors

The third research question elicited the success factors presidents cited in vision development. Four findings are deemed most important here. The first, which is something of a meta-finding and serves as a foundation upon which all best practices emerge is the need for presidents to understand institutional context prior to and as part of vision development. The presidents were right to assert the essential need to know enough of the historical, cultural, political, operational and financial contexts of their institutions. Again, however, this assertion is easily contradicted by the requirement imposed on presidents to offer vision before they are even chosen for the job.

Furthermore, one would not want to see presidents or their teams limiting their visions and strategic creativity because they feel so burdened by context. Many of the presidents in this study confronted difficult circumstances. Some of them used vision to help see beyond those constraints – creatively and yet realistically at the same time. Context should be enabling in this regard and not disabling. One can reasonably question those presidents who dampened vision development as well as the actual visions themselves because they felt so obliged to fix near-term problems. Their motivations and concerns are completely understandable but, to the contrary, shouldn't they have used the visions and vision-development processes to help their staffs and stakeholders see beyond the current dilemmas and give them hope for the future? Again, here is where the need

both to operate in the short term while envisioning the long term is so pronounced. Perhaps in this regard visioning should be seen as a valid tool for managing through a crisis and not merely some kind of luxury to consider when times are good.

It is also interesting to note that none of the presidents commented on all aspects of institutional context discussed in this study. It is quite likely that many of them never even considered certain components of context. For example, only three presidents spoke of the need to calibrate vision and their role in its development in the context of their immediate predecessors. This seems to be an essential practice, nonetheless, since staff and stakeholders are inevitably going to view a new president and new vision through the lens of the previous ones. Only a handful of presidents raised the issue of honoring an institution's history, even using it to advance the vision-development process, and certainly not to criticize the past excessively. One president's adroit understanding of his institution's history helped him tap into a pent-up demand for greatness that had been dormant until he undertook his first visioning exercise. A few presidents also commented on how important it was for them to have understood the history of past visioning and strategic-planning initiatives at their institutions in order to anticipate the mood and motivation of staffs and stakeholders on this subject before proceeding. These are all commendable best practices and presidents engaged in vision development should be aware of and informed by each of them.

All the research participants understood that context also means obtaining deep knowledge about their institutions' financial and enrollment conditions, which were difficult if not perilous at the start of some of these presidents' tenures. Sharing those data with staff and stakeholders engaged in vision development and placing it in appropriate

market context is another recommended best practice. The presidents correctly understood that such knowledge helped them calibrate how ambitious and daring their visions could be and brought the visioning participants together around a shared sense of possibilities and limitations.

Managing their boards of directors through vision development was the third critical success factor cited by presidents. The presidents said they viewed trustees as their most important stakeholders and for good reason; they are accountable to them. They invested a great deal of time, however, in seemingly over-managing trustees and actually keeping them at some distance from the process using a variety of techniques. One can read into this a reluctance by some presidents to fully integrate their trustees into the process because, perhaps, they feared excessive meddling by trustees or worried about board members being exposed to too much of the internal machinations. Their reluctance is understandable and even advisable. That is precisely why, however, trustees should have a meaningful, structured engagement with vision development that optimizes their time and talent and minimizes their downside effects. This starts with trustees directing the president to develop institutional vision in the first place. Most of these presidents clearly knew this was in their job description. Most of them were presented with the vision question during their interviews for the job anyway. Vision is a presidential responsibility, which the vast majority of these presidents evinced. That one president who seemed to be waiting for his board to provide vision or, at minimum, the directive to create a vision was most assuredly moving down the wrong track. He learned that lessons and then seized the mantel of vision-development leadership.

It is advised that presidents seek their boards' formal approval of the visioning and integrated strategic-planning roadmap at the outset of the process as part of a regular board meeting. They should share with trustees how they intend to derive the vision or, more likely, build upon and otherwise adjust the vision and strategic direction they already discussed with trustees at the recruitment stage. Ultimately, as all these research participants did, presidents should seek formal board approval of the vision and the resulting strategic plan designed to achieve that vision at another regularly scheduled meeting.

In between these two stages of the process, however, they should mirror the best practices of many presidents in this study who periodically albeit informally updated their board chairmen and other key trustees on the status of their efforts including sharing with them the draft vision statement and/or body of work representing visionary intent. They do not want to surprise key trustees at that final approval meeting. In fact, they need to be able to shape the approval of the vision in that board meeting well ahead of time. Presidents should not play tricks like designating only one trustee to participate in the visioning and subsequent strategic-planning processes. Instead, in between the two regularly scheduled board meetings to approve the vision-and strategy-development plan and, ultimately, the vision and strategy themselves, presidents should request one facilitated offsite session with the full board very early in the process, modeling what several presidents did here.

Presidents need to lend their visions credibility and weight, which is a third prescribed success factor. Their visible role in the process as well as their skillful incorporation of the board into these deliberations substantially helps in this regard. More

precisely, however, they need to connect their visions to the objectives and strategies intended to achieve them. That one president who said vision needs to be concrete but not specifically measurable was correct. Vision needs to be sufficiently concrete in order to inform and inspire the creation and prioritization of the specific objectives and strategies that are, themselves, highly measurable. In this sense, success in vision development means success in strategic planning. And, when taken together, the full spectrum of visionary intent that includes vision, objectives and strategy must be tied to specific metrics since it is the only way for presidents, trustees and stakeholders to know whether, how and why they have succeeded.

A fourth success factor addresses the semantics issues found in vision and related strategy discussions. Presidents should define the term "vision" at the outset of any formal effort to develop it and share this and other key planning definitions with their staffs and stakeholders engaged in these processes. It is recommended that any definition of vision include both the future destination and action orientation aspects of the definition used in this study. At the same time, however, presidents need to understand that, despite the utility of such definitional precision, the vision term will always be conflated with certain other planning terms and concepts such as objectives and strategy. This is an inevitable part of the integrated if not overlapping nature of vision and strategy.

Conceptual and definitional precision are valued in any planning exercise. However, the author contends that the conflation of the terms vision and strategy generally – and by some of the presidents on some occasions in this study – is not highly problematic. Only one of the presidents who raised the semantics issue actually did anything about defining terms, and those were the specific terms used in his vision

statement such as “academic excellence.” Defining key terms within the actual vision statement is a highly recommended best practice. They help make vision statements more “concrete,” as referenced above. It was therefore surprising to learn how few presidents actually defined terms such as “leading,” “quality,” or “transform.”

One president went so far as to say that defining planning terms was a waste of time. While disagreeing with that contention, it is suggested here that presidents live with the ambiguity between where vision ends and strategy starts and focus instead on the broader, more comprehensive nature of visionary intent. Visionary intent that pairs vision with the objectives and strategies of strategic planning arguably expresses a more complete range of institutional vision than vision statements alone, especially since by choice not all presidents and institutions possess vision statements in the first place. After all, this study reveals that when some presidents talk about vision they are really talking about visionary intent.

Whose Vision is it Anyway?

The fourth and final research question asks whether the institution’s vision should reflect that of the president, the larger community or some hybrid of the two. It is recommended that presidents generally follow the course of the majority of the research participants in this study. They should develop the outline of a bold, differentiated vision early in their tenures and with the knowledge and informal approval of the board of trustees, use this draft vision to recruit and energize their executive teams, create a small vision-development group to adjust and improve the draft vision and make it their own, and then introduce the draft vision to a larger strategic-planning cohort to finalize it,

make it concrete as possible and use it as the basis for developing the visionary intent of objectives and strategy in the early stages of strategic planning.

In following this path, which some of these research participants did, presidents will establish reasonable equilibrium between visionary expectations they and their boards, staffs and stakeholders have of them while working effectively within the culture of shared governance. Presidents operating in this manner will provide a firm rudder of navigational guidance, but then enable their staffs and stakeholders to craft how best to get to their future destination. While it can only be speculative at this point, one worries about the quality of the outcomes produced by the minority of the presidents here who encouraged many staff members and stakeholders to arrive at consensus visions born of shared-governance sensibilities. This best-practice recommendation is a hybrid that basically couples bold, early presidential vision with broad community engagement around how to finalize and achieve it.

The second implication involves emerging from the fourth research question is vision development at the presidential-recruitment stage. This also requires a thoughtful balancing of tensions between wanting to please trustees and recruiters and get the job, on the one hand, and not being presumptuous by developing too extensive and detailed a vision prematurely and without the input of the community on the other hand. Mirroring the suggestion above, it is recommended that presidents outline a general vision in the job-recruitment stage based on the comprehensive study of the institutional context while, at the same time, providing a detailed process for how they will work with the community to design specific, differentiated visionary intent. This is an amalgam of

various approaches the research participants used in this regard and it seems to offer the best outcome.

Furthermore, organizations that represent the interests of trustees such as the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) and college and university presidents such as the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) should consider educating trustees and executive recruiters of the risks of requiring fully formed visions from job candidates long before they assume office. For example, this could constitute a curriculum item in AGB workshops offered to individuals assuming trusteeships for the first time.

Ultimately, new presidents are likely the leading beneficiaries of this research. Most every new president will be confronted with the "what's your vision" question generally and, as has been discovered here, as part of the recruitment process. New presidents may be unprepared to manage this question skillfully and, once on the job, to lead a vision-development process without the benefit of comparable experience or relevant expertise. The need for a practical guidebook on this subject readily emerges from – and will be informed by – this research.

Six "Balancing Acts"

Many of these research outcomes find presidents engaged in balancing acts between two (or more) competing tensions. The research participants reported often finding themselves walking tightropes over contentious, highly political and resource-scarce situations featuring many competing institutional interests and priorities. A brief discussion of these balancing acts provides another way to consider some of these practice implications and also serves as a summary device for this section:

1. *Presidents need to balance the development of bold, early presidential visions with the need to develop vision inclusively, communally and with consensus.* As

discussed above, however, presidents are likely to benefit from tilting in the direction of being bold and early. Of course, presidents should decide what works best for them in their specific contexts. While the literature is split on the subject, there is ample encouragement for presidents to be bold, early and visionary.

2. *Presidents must balance operating in the short term with the desire to chart a course for the long term.* Ultimately, presidents are expected to drive short-term operational and long-term planning agendas at the same time. As with some of these tensions, the presidents in this study understood that these are not mutually exclusive requirements. Still, they did point to how presidents need to help their staffs see the bigger picture of vision and strategy while not losing focus on their daily, operational requirements and vice versa. Presidents will be well served in this regard if they can use a short-term success, for example, to demonstrate the feasibility of a long term vision. These two temporal orientations should work together because they must work together.
3. *Presidents should modulate the desire to engender ambition and creativity with the reality of financial and operational constraints.* Here, too, context will combine with each president's expertise and experience to help him or her find the right place on this continuum. Most presidents here wanted their staffs and stakeholders to be creative and ambitious, and that is the recommended course of action. However presidents must also recognize and even demonstrate to their staffs and stakeholders the pitfalls of doing so and they need to be present and vigilant in reshaping or even disarming particularly untenable or unsustainable visions – as early and thoughtfully as possible.

4. *Presidents must calibrate the utility of creating reasonable tension and fear with wanting to set a positive tone.* This tension applies particularly to those presidents embarking on institutional transformations, where financial and operational conditions are precarious. Many presidents spoke about how far to go in this regard. Most seemed to use descriptions of the reality of their institutions' conditions to create sufficient and even frightening motivation while not resorting to use of personal tension, fear or hostility.
5. *Presidents should balance the requirement to be visible in the process while also giving staff and stakeholders sufficient time and space to make contributions and feel good about those contributions.* Presidents spoke both of being too visible and not visible enough in vision development. This is another challenging balancing act. On the one hand, presidents need to lead visioning and be seen as leading it. On the other hand, they can overdo it and suffocate the motivations and contributions of their people. Each president will need to find what works for them in their specific context and emerge with a visibility profile that is appropriately balanced.
6. *Presidents should motivate staffs and stakeholders in ways that release organizational energy and reinforce the urgency of vision development while not, in the process, creating unrealistic expectations.* This balancing act seems to be particularly vexing. Presidents will need to walk a fine line between advocating for the process and creating a sense of urgency and then actually delivering on the expectations that result. Some presidents said they worried about creating unwarranted expectations about the vision-development process and the future of

their institutions that neither they nor their organizations would be able to fulfill. Managing people through vision development effectively means carefully calibrating their excitement levels and personal and institutional expectations with the reality of the current context and resulting work. Presidents who engage in a constant process of calibration and recalibration throughout these initiatives will stand a better chance of aligning expectations with outcomes.

Recommendations for Future Research

Areas for potential future research are discussed here, stemming directly from the conclusions and implications presented above.

In terms of the vision-development parallels with leadership theory, three areas for potential research emerge. The first concerns the suggested parallels and points of intersections themselves. Could understanding the relationship between vision and the evolution of leadership theory over time better improve our understanding of institutional vision as a phenomenon, our knowledge of the best ways for presidents to engage in its development and even the possibility of creating an overarching theory of vision development.

Second, do presidents engaged in vision development borrow knowingly or unknowingly from different aspects of leadership theory – Contingency and Situational Leadership theories for determining the right equilibria for the product and process of vision development, Shared and Servant Leadership theories to understand how best to create open, democratic and participatory environments, and Complexity Leadership theories to succeed in modern organizations that require centralized vision to serve as a cohering mechanism – to engineer success in vision development? Whether or not they

are consciously picking and choosing among tenets of various leadership theories, it would be useful to probe why they choose to do so and what brought them to these actions as necessary components of what they deem to be successful vision-development initiatives?

A third possible research domain within this discussion is to understand better how trustees, recruiters and donors who demand that presidents deliver a vision as part of the job interview and recruitment process actually perceive the leadership orientations and theoretical hybrids discussed above. In other words, do they understand the risks and benefits of pushing presidential candidates to espouse vision in environments where Contingency and Situational Leadership models are at work in both Shared and Servant Leadership as well as Complexity Leadership contexts are extant? What are these risks and benefits?

If strong, centralized vision is actually so relevant to complex adaptive systems on the edge of chaos, as Youngblood and others argued, are trustees, recruiters and donors actually doing these would-be presidents and the institutions they represent a favor? Would it be useful to develop a rigorous, formal scorecard of some kind by which trustees and recruiters could calibrate their views on this subject and, at minimum, individually and collectively understand what they are getting into when asking, perhaps prematurely, presidential candidates for fully developed visions?

The second conclusion on boldness of presidential visioning and the need to balance it with financial realities would also benefit from future research. Presidents could use some type of empirically derived multifactor assessment tool to guide, inspire, stretch and yet, somehow, appropriately restrain their thinking and the visioning

deliberations of their teams. This tool could highlight, prioritize and inform the various tension points between the two sometimes-competing objectives of bold vision and fiscal prudence. In other words, can future research provide a disciplined mechanism to arbitrate between trustees, presidents and staffs who risk overreaching and, say, chief financial officers or chief business officers whose predilections are to restrain or deny such ambitions?

The practice of vision development could also benefit from research of what is actually and specifically meant by bold vision in the first place. There are so many ways in which presidents and institutions can offer bold visions in far-ranging domains from, for example, academic programs, delivery systems and research priorities to civic engagement, globalization and diversity or from specific targets for growth in *U.S. News & World Report* rankings to goals for alumni and donor engagement and master planning. The pool of "boldness" ideas seems limitless, and presidents and their institutions can drown in it without some specific definitions and categorizations of boldness that could then be more formally weighed against the fiscal constraints referenced above. Without the outcomes stemming from this type of research, decision makers cannot scientifically gauge the costs and benefits of visions that are not bold enough or too bold or, conversely, real and perceived financial limits that are too constrained or not constrained enough? Can research provide us with more empirical bases for calibrating vision than the power position or budget of particular individuals? After all, how much boldness is too much and how would somebody know when that line has been crossed? Right now, some of these research participants are speaking about balancing ambition and boldness

with fiscal reality largely on notional, abstract bases and without a rigorous, studied framework for doing so.

The subject of presidents offering visions early in – or even before the start of – their tenures defines the second part of this scholarly conclusion and is not without controversy in this study. As was discussed above, some of these research participants contended that being early with a vision was essential to their success and that of their institutions. They find some support in the literature from Bolman and Gallos (2011), for example, who urged college and university presidents to take an unequivocal, early lead in developing a vision of where they want their institutions to go, "Knowledge is power; and academic leaders empower themselves when they know where they are, where they want to go, and what will get them there" (p. 9).

Durden (2009, from Weill) also argued that a president's early approximation of vision and strategic destination is essential for attracting the best-possible leadership team. However, without research focused on this "early vision" question, how are presidents to know what is right in this regard? Indeed, a minority of the research participants maintained that offering an early, independent vision is inappropriate and runs contrary to an open, democratic vision-development process that rightly embraces shared governance. The presidents who offered this view believe inclusion is essential not only during broader strategic-planning efforts, as was enacted by all of the presidents in this study, but in crafting the institutional vision itself. They would disagree with advocates of moving early with presidential vision because doing so is not in keeping with shared governance and, some of them suggested, not conducive to developing

successful visions. It is impossible to know who might be correct in this regard without additional research.

Ultimately, if research-derived proof of the validity of one of these schools of thought could be produced, it would need to come from assessments of the actual success of these presidents' institutions. In other words, can research demonstrate causal relationships between early (and/or bold) visions and the ultimate effectiveness of those visions as measured by institutional performance? And how best in such a multivariate context with so many other success factors at play can researchers specifically link early (and/or bold) visions to such successful performance?

Though they represent a minority view in this study, advocates for full inclusion who do not believe in early presidential visions also find support in the literatures, both from the shared, distributed and servant leadership thinkers discussed earlier as well as higher education scholars, practitioners and advocates of shared governance. For example, McLaughlin wrote that, "Although both leadership and management are important capacities for a president, a facility with governance is the sine qua non" (p. 10). Zimpher (in Percy et al., 2006), who is singularly credited with championing the "Milwaukee Idea" referenced in Chapter Two, said that while "vision trumps everything," it must be "derived at the hands of many" (p. 224). Percy et al. also wrote that, "A lone voice for change is rarely effective, no matter how charismatic or well-positioned the champion" (p. 29).

Nonetheless, Trachtenberg (2008) advised otherwise, asserting that presidents can go too far in accommodating the views and interests of stakeholders. He described as an "art form" the balancing between "when you need to listen to others and when you need

to go your own way" (p. 49). And Percy et al. (2006) also warned that too much inclusion in a shared-governance environment brings into question the willingness and ability of presidents to pursue, "the power of the big idea" (p. 29).

As with future research possibilities into the "boldness" domain discussed above, more precision is needed in understanding what is meant by "early" in presidential vision development and, for that matter, how early is too early for a president to develop his or her own institutional vision – at least as this point relates to those who believe that presidents developing their own visions is a good and necessary practice in the first place. The fact that most of the presidents in this study were asked for their visions during their recruitment was an unexpected finding and, on the face of it, would suggest that many presidential candidates these days feel compelled to offer institutional visions very early in the hiring process.

This comes against the admonitions of authors such as Zimpher (in Percy et al., 2006) who warn that, "At all costs, the president should avoid answering the question, 'What is your vision for the university?' without the imprimatur of the larger academic community" (p. 234). This is a potentially fruitful area of future research into, for example, why trustees and executive recruiters exert this expectation in the first place, whether they believe such early vision development helps or hurts the presidents once they take office, and how presidential candidates can best prepare themselves to answer or not answer the question. Developing empirical knowledge in this area could well have major implications for creation of future theory with regard to the presidential role in vision development especially, for example, as it might relate to the role of trustees and executive recruiters in creating a phenomenon that might be labeled "forced visioning."

As for the third conclusion involving context, one can only speculate about effectively matching presidents to contexts or, as discussed earlier, successfully matching visions to contexts without research and resulting empirical knowledge. The vision development field of study, which could emerge from this work, could also benefit from research into whether and how certain types of institutional contexts assist or detract from presidents' roles in vision development or the actual visions themselves.

While this issue did not arise in the interviews, one wonders whether these presidents as job candidates were asked to discuss their potential operating contexts and how their institutional visions actually grew from and fit within such contexts. For example, and borrowing from Fielder and Chemers' (1974) Leader-Match Theory, might future research provide a corollary Context-Match Theory that could emerge from this study and inform the future of vision development? This line of thinking certainly buttresses Resnek Pierce's (2012) view that, "Every campus culture is idiosyncratic in the way that institutions practice shared governance" (p. 67). She advised presidents to develop vision and strategy with a deep understanding of their specific institutional contexts. Research is needed to support Resneck Pierce common-sense perspective based on her leadership experience, albeit one lacking any empirical precision.

As for the fourth scholarly conclusion, one can speculate if these twin prevailing negative narratives – however accurate or not they may be – are creating a foreboding environment for attracting and retaining the best possible men and women of vision to lead U.S. colleges and universities and develop and implement bold, effective visions for institutional success. One also wonders whether such consistently gloomy assessments of the state of U.S. higher education inhibit the ambition and boldness that some of the

research participants said is essential for presidents and stakeholders engaged in vision development and, in the process, become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indeed, are the volume and nature of these scholarly and popular assessments, however true they may be, creating a new kind of problematic context facing college presidents as well as their vision-development ambitions? The phenomena expressed here merit theorizing and the future research needed to understand and either validate or invalidate them.

One can also speculate as to why so many scholars, practitioners, politicians and observers are choosing to accentuate the negative in this regard and why, to the contrary, the arguably great men and women of vision today do not seem to be sufficiently showcased in the scholarly and practice literature. Furthermore, it would be useful to study what type of vision and vision-development processes Dennison's "great men" such as Robert Maynard Hutchins and James Conant developed as presidents who led in far-less-inclusive, more authoritarian and simpler times. This is another consideration that would seem to merit future research.

In examining the four scholarly conclusions presented in this study as a whole, however, a larger consideration emerges for future research. It would be worth studying whether and how formal institutional vision developed through the processes detailed in this research actually produces the planned strategic or structural interventions needed to achieve that vision. As a corollary study, it would be also useful to know whether and how actual, positive changes were made to institutional performance born of such vision-inspired interventions.

To achieve, document and communicate these outcomes, however, higher education requires more precise and widely accepted performance measures. Mechanisms

are then needed to make reasonable causal links between institutional vision and these institutional performance metrics. Right now, overall measurements are weak and any causal connections between vision and performance are virtually non-existent.

Concluding Remarks

This study produced 21 specific findings concerning the role of college and university presidents in the development of institutional vision. A majority of the 10 presidents participating in this work concurred with many if not most of the findings but, importantly, not with all of them. For example, while a majority of research participants indicated that their institutions' visions were largely or exclusively their own personal visions manifested through more democratic vision- and strategy-development processes, a strong and vocal minority of presidents disagreed with this top-down approach. These presidents said it was essential for leaders of shared-governance systems to ensure that their institutions' visions are the authentic products of more open and participatory processes of community engagement.

The majority of convergent opinions mixed with the minority of interesting, divergent views across the 21 findings to produce four scholarly conclusions, each with implications for theory as well as recommendations for future research. For example, the evolution of leadership theory was presented as a tool for considering effective vision development within colleges and universities. In this context, a majority of the research participants found points of equilibrium using various leadership schools of thought that resulted in many strong, leader-centric visions applied to what are, nonetheless and paradoxically, complex, open and democratic systems of shared governance.

Indeed, while the importance of institutional vision had been diffused in the decentralizing environments of Shared and Servant Leadership theories in the 1970s and '80s, it returned to the Complexity Leadership discussion from the 1990s to today as a center of gravity needed to hold together the otherwise centrifugal forces of complex adaptive systems. It is an ironic question, but might the open, democratic, decentralizing and widely participatory aspects of Servant Leadership found in higher education actually require strong, centralized leader roles in originating vision in order to keep so many disparate constituencies pointed in the right direction? This is a significant proposition that would greatly benefit from future research. The purportedly analogous or parallel relationships between vision and the evolution of leadership theory could well be the basis for a new (and counterintuitive) theory of the presidential role in vision development in higher education.

The research findings and scholarly conclusions served as the basis for a thorough presentation of numerous best-practice recommendations. Among them is the essential need to understand institutional context prior to embarking on vision development, but not to be overly burdened by it. This precise understanding of context in its many forms – cultural, political, historical, financial and operational – couples with each president's expertise and experience to enable them to balance many competing tensions. These tensions occur because presidents find themselves between competing and even contradictory expectations for visionary leadership, on the one hand, and adherence to shared-governance standards on the other hand.

Another key best-practice recommendation is for presidents to develop the outline of a bold, differentiated vision early in their tenures and with the knowledge and informal

approval of the board of trustees, use this draft vision to recruit and energize their executive teams, create a small vision-development group to adjust and improve the draft vision and make it their own, and then introduce the draft vision to a larger strategic-planning cohort to finalize it, make it concrete as possible and use it as the basis for developing the visionary intent that couples with objectives and strategy in the early stages of strategic planning. In total, these best-practice recommendations can serve as the basis for a practical guidebook for presidents on vision development, especially suited for new presidents who may be confronting the vision question for the first time in their careers.

The significance of this study also owes to the fact that institutions and their leadership teams are investing large sums of money and considerable time developing formal institutional vision. It is hoped that this research will help presidents and their staffs and stakeholders improve how they do so and, in general, help catalyze conversations among presidents, leadership teams and boards of trustees on how best to create meaningful vision.

It is also expected that these research findings will be available to the large number of new presidents now taking office and embarking on visioning and strategy-development exercises of their own. Many new, often first-time presidents – and the trustees, search committees and recruiters who hire them – will be searching for best-practice and case-history evidence and experience to help them design their own successful vision-development initiatives.

As reviewed in Chapters One and Two, an assertive though largely unempirical case has been consistently made by scholars and practitioners about the importance of

formal institutional vision and leader engagement in it for many decades now. It is hoped that this research will trigger a process intended either to corroborate these assertions or question them, at least in the context of higher education.

Ultimately, and extending well beyond the confines of this study, a central question for research and practice that emerges from all of this work is whether and how an effective vision-development process can improve an institutional vision. A related question is whether and how effective vision development can enhance subsequent vision communication and vision implementation, the next stages on the vision continuum suggested in Chapter One.

Of course, a foundational question remains whether and how effective vision improves actual institutional performance in the first place. More research is required in all these domains. By starting at the beginning of the process with vision development and the leader role in it, however, it is hoped that this study catalyzes new and needed investigation into what is an important albeit understudied phenomenon. In the process, it is also hoped that this work can lead to the promulgation of vision-development theories that make empirical contributions to our overall understanding of institutional leadership and organizational performance.

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Appendix A

Initial Contact Letter with Informed Consent Notification

Date

Dear (President):

I hope this note finds you well. I'm writing as a doctoral student in The George Washington University's Executive Leadership Development Program with a request to interview you for my dissertation research.

I'm studying how college and university presidents engage in development of formal institutional vision, often as part of strategic planning processes. Among my Research Questions is to ask, for example, whether an institutional vision is (or should be) that of the leader, a shared vision reflecting the input of stakeholders, or some hybrid of the two. The only assumption I'm making with this invitation is that you have led a visioning and/or related strategic-planning process as president at some time over the past seven years.

Your time is valuable, and I know how busy you are. I'd welcome finding a time of convenience to you in September, October or November for one 90-minute, semi-structured interview. I'd conduct the interview in your office, taking notes and using a digital audio-recording device. The recording will be used for transcription purposes only.

I truly hope that you are willing to participate in my study. Please know that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and that you can discontinue your participation at any time without loss of the rights and benefits to which you are entitled. I know that you would make a substantial contribution to understanding how presidents (help) form institutional vision. This work should be of great value to presidents – especially new ones – as they consider how best to lead vision-development and strategic-planning processes. It's also my hope that this work will open new scholarly conversations about leader roles in visioning.

The study's Principal Investigator is Dr. Michael Marquardt, Department Chair, Human and Organizational Learning, Graduate School of Education and Human Development, The George Washington University. Dr. Marquardt can be reached at:

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The study has extremely minimal confidentiality risks. Please know, however, that I will not reveal your name or institution in my dissertation, referring to interviewees as, for example, "president of a small, private, urban college." All field notes and transcripts will be kept in one private, secure location.

Please let me know if you are willing to participate in this study. Doing so via e-mail will serve as recognition of your agreement and informed consent. I can coordinate details of our interview with you directly or with your executive assistant. Thanks again!

Sincerely,

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Context

1. Brief descriptions of:
    - The institution and president's tenure there.
    - Most recent visioning process at the institution involving the president.

Institutional Vision Development

2. How would you define institutional vision?
3. Why do colleges and universities develop formal institutional visions?
4. How is vision best developed within colleges and universities?

Presidential Role in Vision Development

5. How did you lead the vision-development process here? What role(s) did you play?
    - Do you feel you played those roles well? If so, why? If not, why?
6. How did you prepare yourself for the vision-development process?
    - How did you prepare your organization for the vision-development process?
7. Did you see yourself as the leader of the institution's vision-development process?
8. Was the resulting vision largely or even exclusively your vision?
    - How much of an institution's vision should be the president's vision?
9. Was the vision a consensus involving your vision and some/many stakeholders' visions?
    - Describe key faculty, staff, alumni, and student roles in the vision development?
10. Was the resulting vision largely devoid of your specific input and opinions?
11. Has the resulting vision been of value to you in making decisions about the institution?
12. Was the vision process part of a strategic planning initiative or done as a separate matter?
13. What (if anything) would you do differently to improve the process and your role in it?

Presidential Leadership Priorities

14. Was vision development a high priority for you?
    - How would you rank it at the time among your many priorities?
15. How much of your time did it take, roughly?
16. How if at all did (does) it support and inform your fundraising objectives?
17. How if at all did (does) it support and inform your enrollment objectives?