

Exploring University Presidents' Decision-Making Processes Throughout Their Tenure  
in Office

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## **Dedication**

To my family who have inspired me to know that I can do whatever I want in this world, challenged me when my resolve waivered, and believed in me when I didn't even believe in myself. My mother who was a teacher her whole life and it wasn't until she was gone that I realized that she was my best and most impactful teacher. For my father who was often silent but spoke volumes with a word, a look, or a hug. For both of them, who never stopped being surprised that the kid who disliked school and didn't even want to go to, or stay in, college was now earning a doctorate. Their surprise was always balanced with a healthy dose of pride and I appreciate that more than they will ever know. To my brother who taught me more lessons than I am still willing to admit and who I am proud to call both a brother and a friend. Your service to education is a constant reminder of the impact we can all make with passion and effort.

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## **Abstract of the Dissertation**

### **Exploring University Presidents' Decision-Making Processes Throughout Their Tenure in Office**

This qualitative inquiry examined the research question: How do university presidents' decision-making processes change during the "seasons" of their tenure in office (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991)? The study was guided by Hambrick and Fukutomi's (1991) theory of the seasons of the CEO's tenure and how these dynamic periods impacted the decision-making processes of university presidents. The research attempted to further the understanding of how a president's tenure affects the decision-making processes through task interest, power, knowledge, information diversity, and commitment to a paradigm. The research utilized leadership, decision-making, succession and transition, life cycle, CEO/presidency, and university literature as its foundation and the results informed theory and practice regarding tenure, decision-making, and university presidents.

The study offered five conclusions. (1) There appears to be a time when a presidency has outlived its effectiveness but the length is different for each president and it is difficult to identify during the presidency. (2) There appear to be signs of when a president has moved into a state of dysfunction. (3) There are no clear standards for success in the academic presidency and success can be perceived as a lack of failure. (4) Most change in a president's paradigm and decision-making approach appears to occur early in their tenure and early success leads to confidence and potential entrenchment late in a tenure. (5) Decisions are rarely made with perfect information and consultation is

essential for decision-making processes within complex organizations. The study offered recommendations related to theory, practice, and future research.

## Table of Contents

<b>Dedication</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Abstract of the Dissertation</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Overview of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	6
Purpose of the Study and Research Question	8
Statement of Potential Significance	10
Conceptual Framework	11
Leadership or Management	11
Decision-Making Processes	14
Succession and Transition	16
Theoretical Foundation	21
Summary of the Methodology	22
Limitations	24
Definition of Key Terms	24
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	<b>26</b>
CEOs and Businesses	26
University Presidents	29
History of Universities	31
Structure and Culture of Universities	32
Governance of Universities	34
Unique Nature of the President's Role	36
Succession	40
Decision-Making Processes	45
Theories	49
Leadership	50
Seasons of a CEO's Tenure	52
Dimensions of Change Over Time	54
Seasons	65
<b>Chapter 3: Research Methodology</b>	<b>80</b>
Overview of Methodology	80
Research Questions	80
Research Procedures	81
Unit of Analysis	84

Sampling Strategy and Recruitment	84
Criteria	85
Sample Size	86
Data Collection	87
Logistics	88
Interview Protocol	88
Recordings, Notes, and Transcription	90
Data Analysis	90
Validity/Trustworthiness	91
<b>Chapter 4: Results</b>	<b>94</b>
Overview of the Sample	95
Overview of the Codes and Themes	97
Theme 1 Presidencies often last too long and presidents are no longer the right person for their institution	97
Theme 2 Presidents need principles for decision-making that adapt over time	101
Theme 3 Presidents have a responsibility to make decisions and gather advice and input in the process	106
Theme 4 Presidents did not change their approach but their confidence and the community's relationship with them did change	110
Theme 5 Managing crisis requires swift action and integrity	114
Theme 6 Presidencies should start with setting goals and building relationships	120
Theme 7 Personnel decisions require a deft touch and courage	123
Theme 8 There is a value to getting advice and perspective from outside the institution	124
Summary	126
<b>Chapter 5: Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations</b>	<b>131</b>
Interpretations	131
Conclusions	134
Conclusion 1	134
Conclusion 2	137
Conclusion 3	139
Conclusion 4	142
Conclusion 5	146
Recommendations	149
Recommendations Related to Theory	150
Recommendations Related to Practice	152
Recommendations Related to Future Research	154
Final Reflections	155
<b>References</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Appendix A: Letter of Invitation</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Appendix B: Informed Consent Form</b>	<b>166</b>





## **List of Tables**

Definition of Key Terms	22
Decision-Making Choice Matrix	43
The Five Seasons of a CEO's Tenure	61
Presidential Demographics	90
Themes Derived From Codes	120

## **Chapter 1**

### **Overview**

Decision-making processes evolve and change over time (Eitzen & Yetman, 1972; Grusky, 1963; Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). This generally accepted premise is illustrated as each person reflects on their own growth and development and realizes how they have changed, grown, and matured over time. The same is true of the leaders in our organizations as “much of the skill essential for effective leadership is learned from experience,” (Yukl, 2010, p. 467) and each experience has some impact on the individual. The challenges, variety of tasks, and feedback that come from situations and decisions have a direct impact on the decision-making processes of every leader (Yukl, 2010, p. 382 & 467).

The evolution of a leader is often discussed and even examined but there is very little true understanding of the complete picture of a leader’s tenure. Yukl (2010) believes that the studies and theories that have come before have merit but “more research is needed to examine and explain the processes that occur during a leader’s tenure in office” (p. 385). Thirty years ago, the work of Cohen and March (1974) provided the first broad examination of the university president to include the focus areas on tenure, decision-making, and leadership. This research study will seek to fill some of the remaining gaps and provide a greater understanding of a university president’s tenure through an examination of decision-making processes while in office.

The decision-making process of university presidents is an under-studied phenomenon. This study is focused on university presidents and how their decision-

making processes may change throughout their tenure as president. The focus is solely on the president as “researchers have found that organizations become reflections of their top executives” (Henderson, Miller, and Hambrick, 2006, p. 447). Those that rise to this level are faced with innumerable decisions ranging from the mundane to the critical and rarely are these decisions made in a world free of ambiguity and complexity (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996, p. 39). Situations facing leaders at this level “lack structure, are open to interpretation, and pertinent information can be elusive, cryptic, and even contradictory” (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996, p. 39). Decision-making can best be described as an effort to make the best possible decision on behalf of an organization while dealing with a lack of comprehensive information in a “boundedly rational” way (Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Mooney, 2005, p. 478). Often, this requires leaders to make decisions based on limited information and with a focus on prior, successful ways of addressing issues. This is emblematic of the “commitment to a paradigm” and “information diversity” dimensions present in the Seasons of a CEO’s Tenure (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) theory.

Hambrick and Fukutomi’s (1991) theory of the Seasons of a CEO’s Tenure will guide this examination of decision-making processes among university presidents. Gabarro’s (1987) “The Dynamics of Taking Charge” and Miller’s (1991) “Stale in the Saddle” will provide additional structure and detail to the theoretical framework used in this study. The work of Gabarro (1987) examines the initial entry period of a manager and provides both context and depth to the work of Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) while Danny Miller’s (1991, 2001) work illuminates the latter years of an individual’s tenure.

The Seasons of a CEO's Tenure provides an excellent theoretical framework for an unacknowledged phenomenon — decision-making processes throughout the entire tenure of a university president. In this study, CEO and university president are used interchangeably as their roles are often seen and described as similar (Padilla, 2005). There are many similarities between the two top management positions and it has been argued that the position of university president is more challenging, more isolating, and requires a greater level of management expertise (Asghar, 2013; Witt/Keiffer Study, 2013; *The Leadership Imperative*, 2006; Padilla, 2005). One president even described their experience as “a lonely life in a fishbowl” (Kerr & Gade, 1989) and Warren Bennis (as cited in Asghar, 2013) goes further by saying that “no manner of leader, save possibly a mayor of a large city, deals with as vast and complicated a cartography of stakeholders as does the head of a major American research university” (p. 2). Perhaps in a nod to this enhanced set of challenges, some have begun to reference presidents as the chief education officers (CEOs) at institutions.

Utilizing the seasons of a CEO's tenure as a framework for analysis, this research will focus on presidents' decision-making processes during their tenure. These decision-making opportunities will provide appropriate “moments in time” and will be the basis of this qualitative study. Although some research has been done on how leaders approach decision-making, the university context and the time bounded nature of the study will provide new and different insights.

Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) developed five seasons in their theory of CEO tenure – response to mandate, experimentation, selection of an enduring theme, convergence, and dysfunction. There are five dimensions that define and describe a

leaders' transition between each of the seasons – “commitment to paradigm, task knowledge, information diversity, task interest, and power” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 723). Together the seasons and dimensions will provide a context to describe how decision-making processes evolve through a president's tenure.

There is nothing more important to an organization than its leader. The leader can have a significant influence on the organizational structure, policies, and direction and this influence is poorly understood and modest in its estimations (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Mackey, 2008). The importance of the leader has, at times, been debated and questioned and this debate must be acknowledged. One of the major works utilized in this study is Cohen and March's *Leadership and Ambiguity* (1974) where they compare leaders to a driver of a skidding car by noting, “whether he is convicted of manslaughter or receives a medal for heroism is largely outside his control” (p. 203). This statement challenges the idea that a leader has great control over their organization, its employees, and its success or failure. While these challenges are important to consider, it is rare to find an excellent organization that lacks in the strength of its leader (Grusky, 1963; Katz, 2009; Mackey, 2007). Further, many of the crises faced by organizations can be defined as crises of leadership (Conger & Nadler, 2004; Fredrickson, Hambrick, & Baumrin, 1988; Henderson, Miller, & Hambrick, 2006; Miller, 1991).

The work of Stogdill (1948, as noted in Vroom and Jago, 2007, p. 18) states that an “adequate analysis of leadership involves not only a study of leaders, but also of situations.” The focus on leadership of an overall organization and enterprise can be defined as “strategic leadership” (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996). This term is meant

to encompass the work of the CEO and comes with it the belief that “performance is determined in great part by the strategic choices and other major organizational decisions made within the firm” (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996, p. 2).

The importance of leadership is exemplified in a university and there are few people more important to the life of a university than its president. There are numerous reports about the early, controversial, or even expected departure of a president or the excitement surrounding the arrival of a new president (Conger & Nadler, 2004; Fredrickson, Hambrick, & Baumrin, 1988; Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Bogue, 2013). Conversely, there are rarely reports about the middle years of presidents, especially those who stay in office 10 years or more. In a higher education setting, many “search for some unattainable ‘Ideal President’ and are fooled into believing that such a person could actually exist. Hence, there is inevitable disappointment when the individual appointed turns out to be human after all” (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 4). The concept of the heroic or “great man” model of leadership was once the norm and while some institutions still seek out a savior as their president, many have realized that this is rare. The role of a university president is incredibly complex as the “scale and diversity of the contemporary university” is considered to be “comparable to that of major global corporations or government agencies” (Duderstadt, 2007, p. 105 and 132). One popular source stated, “Apple’s a nice little enterprise, but Stanford will be thriving in 200 years, while Apple will be a historical footnote” (Asghar, 2013, p. 2). The historical nature of universities provides stability, expectation, and a high level of complexity.

This complexity leads to a great number of unexpected and challenging situations for a president throughout their time in office and often a lower level of control in the

factors contributing to decisions they must make (Asghar, 2013, p. 2). By utilizing Hambrick and Fukutomi's Seasons of a CEO's Tenure (1991), this study will seek to shine a light on how the unique leadership challenges faced by presidents are managed at one of history's longest lasting institutions, the University.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Each organization has a leader or person at the top and all organizations face the challenge of turnover at all levels. As stated by Padilla and Ghosh (2003), "turnover at the top of organizations has its virtues and its costs, and too little of it may be as bad as too much" (p. 30). In between times of transition, a leader makes many decisions that can be strategic, tactical, and even mundane. How the leader approaches these decisions changes over time, as identified by the Seasons of a CEO's Tenure theoretical framework (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991), and should be examined, and hopefully, understood. Cohen and March (1974) examined the presidency and provided incredible insights into all aspects of the position with emphasis on what they called "the processes of choice" (p. 81). The decision opportunities they identified are based on "fundamentally ambiguous stimuli" (Cohen and March, 1974, p. 81). The process by which presidents make these decisions, and how this process changes during a president's tenure deserves greater examination and analysis.

Understanding how a leader functions and makes decisions is important for the health and success of any organization. Most of the previous theories and research only address the end and beginning of tenure and the process of transition and succession (Carey and Ogden, 2000; Gabarro, 1987; McLaughlin, 1996; Sanaghan, Goldstein, and Gaval, 2008; Martin, Samuels, and Associates, 2004). This leaves a significant portion of

a leader's tenure unexamined and possibly misunderstood. Previous works also fail to take into account that universities are incredibly dynamic, complex, and unique organizations that function and exist in a different environment than almost any other type of organization. University presidents are faced with innumerable challenges both internally and externally which many believe contributes to the quick and abrupt end of presidencies (Martin, Samuels, and Associates, 2004; McLaughlin, 1996; Sanaghan, Goldstein, Gaval, 2008; Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue, 2013).

The average tenure of a university president has diminished significantly over the last 100 years from 9.5 in 1929 to 5.2 years in 2005 (Padilla, 2005; Martin, Samuels, and Associates, 2004). Many studies focus on transition and succession and ignore the largest time period within a president's tenure. This middle period is often the most significant time period in a president's tenure as it is the time when they have survived the initial challenges of the presidency and have found their way of leading the organization (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 738). Additionally, a president needs time to become effective in their role and these average tenures of 5.2 years do not allow presidents to reach their full potential (Padilla and Ghosh, 2000). These middle years are also when presidencies take a turn for the better or worse and understanding them better can assist universities in identifying challenges before they become too large or untenable. The Seasons theory helps us understand the significance of presidents who stay too long as well as the dangers of multiple presidents who stay for only a short time and never reach an optimized level of performance (Padilla and Ghosh, 2000, p. 738).

Most university presidents are hired from outside of their institution while the "average CEO has been with the same company for twenty-three years" and has risen

through the ranks of one organization (Padilla, 2005, p. 22). This history with an organization provides context, familiarity, and credibility that serves these CEOs well. This important institutional knowledge and history is missing from the experience of most university presidents.

The functioning of the CEO or president over time “has significant implications for organizational performance” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p.720). The weight and significance of each decision made by a president underscores the critical need to gain a better understanding of how they evolve over time (Schmidt, 1958). It is often assumed that skills, traits, training, and experience combine to make a leader successful but Fiedler (1972) notes, “even when there are great differences in training and experience, and performance criteria are reliably measured, relatively untrained and inexperienced leaders perform as well as those who are well trained and experienced” (p. 453). This provides a significant area for study as it posits there is more at play in success or failure than either inherent traits or developable skills, but that there can be a match between a leader and a situation that must be considered.

### **Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to explore university presidents’ decision-making processes over time as conceptualized by Hambrick and Fukutomi’s seasons of tenure (1991). Organizations and employees want to know why and how their president or CEO makes the decisions they make on behalf of the organization. While this study will not provide a predictive model, it will describe how presidents’ decision-making process evolves and changes over time. Decisions are often the main role of a president or CEO and depending on the context of leader’s tenure; decisions take on a set of unique

circumstances and implications. Peterson's (1975) study of critical incidents describes this change during tenure when he shared that "new presidents often had a mandate to make dramatic changes for the well-being of the institution, whereas experienced presidents sometimes expressed the feeling that to make dramatic changes would be viewed as out of character with the style of administration they had established" (p. 50). This distinction leads to one of the main drivers of this study.

Presidents are often stuck in a world that expects them to be quite agile and open to change initially but also desires a president who can become predictable yet still successful over time. Thus, the effectiveness of a president is not linked necessarily to tenure, but to "his ability to administer, lead, and act in a manner commensurate with the needs of the institution" (Peterson, 1975, p. 50). Presidents must be what their institution needs at that time and must continue to evolve along with, and ahead of, the environment and the institution. However, the need for consistency from a president over time can be difficult when the environment requires continued flexibility and innovation. Examining decisions over time and how presidents approach them through Hambrick and Fukutomi's (1991) Seasons of a CEO's Tenure framework will help to understand how decisions are made and what factors lead to change in this process across the seasons.

The problem statement highlights the essential need for universities to better understand the decision-making processes of a university president throughout their tenure. To best address this problem, the research question to be answered by this study is:

*How do university presidents' decision-making processes change during the "seasons" of their tenure (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991) in office?*

### **Statement of Potential Significance**

Warren Bennis (2007) writes, “leadership always matters and it has never mattered more than it does now” (p. 2) and this highlights the value of continued discussion and research about decision-making processes. There are many biographies and autobiographies of all types of leaders, including university presidents. However, there are few that take a number of leaders in similar roles, such as university president, and seek to illuminate particular aspects of their entire experience. Much of the theory and subsequent research about CEOs and other top leaders in organizations simply seek to tell the beginning or end of the story, or a combination of both, but rarely examine the entire tenure. Additionally, most of the biographies and autobiographies are told from the perspective of success and achievement rather than struggle and challenge.

Past teachings of leadership were based solely on the “biographies of great men” (Bennis, 2007, p. 2) and it is argued that today we need “inspirational stories about wonderful leaders as well as grim cautionary tales about bad ones” (p. 2). Similar to Bennis’ findings, many biographies and memoirs from presidents spend the majority of their pages on successes, highlights, and conquests instead of focusing on the problems they faced. When problems are mentioned, those selected tend to only be those that are managed successfully and without issue or lingering consequences. While many of these stories are spread throughout the tenure of the president, the positive light in which they are framed removes some of the value in truly understanding the American presidency. One exception to this trend is found in the work of Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue’s (2013), *Presidencies Derailed*, which describes the experiences of university presidents’ whose tenures were cut short and seeks to identify the reasons for their “derailment”.

The changing role of presidencies and the volatility of the environment within which they work is explained by this work and illustrated by their report that “during 2009 and 2010, fifty college, university, and system presidents resigned, retired prematurely, or were fired” (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Bogue 2013, p. vii). Despite the detail of this work, the majority of the story is left untold and this research starts to fill in that gap. The six main causes of derailment that the authors identified are:

- Ethical lapses, ranging from lavish spending to limited information sharing;
- Poor interpersonal skills, such as arrogant attitudes, volatile tempers, and weak communications skills;
- Inability to lead key constituencies, including board members, government officials, cabinet members, and faculty;
- Difficulty adapting to institutional culture, community context, or the academic presidency;
- Failure to meet business objectives, such as financial goals, fundraising expectations, and enrollment projections; and
- Board shortcomings, from flawed search processes to dysfunctional board dynamics to conflicts of interest (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Bogue 2013, p. x).

Each of these alone could be enough to derail even the strongest leader but one important aspect of this list is how it further highlights the exceptional complexity of this role and the dynamic and ever-changing environment of a university.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Leadership or Management**

This study focuses specifically on the decision-making processes of leaders for a

number of important reasons. Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (2013) utilize the words of Warren Bennis in their book, *Management of Organizational Behavior*, regarding the differences between management and leadership.

Leaders conquer the context – the volatile, turbulent, ambiguous surroundings that sometimes seem to conspire against us and will surely suffocate us if we let them, while managers surrender to it. The manager administrates; the leader innovates. The manager is a copy; the leader is an original. The manager maintains; the leader develops. The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people. The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust. The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective. The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why. The manager has an eye on the bottom line; the leader has his eye on the horizon. The manager imitates; the leader originates. The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it. Managers do things right; leaders do the right thing. (p. 4)

A leader is often found in the crosshairs, in the tough position, and in situations where there is no “right” answer. They can only hope for the best or least harmful direction in these instances. These types of situations are made for leaders and can be overwhelming to managers. The three competencies identified for leadership are “diagnosing, adapting, and communicating” (Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson, 2013, p. 6). These are particularly important when a leader is faced with determining the best course of action without a full picture of the situation, its cause(s), or the potential outcomes from any number of actions the leader may take.

In contrast, a manager's key skills are technical, human, and conceptual (p. 8-9). While the last skill could certainly be applicable to a leader, in the managerial context conceptualization is focused more narrowly on the particular areas of responsibility the manager oversees rather than on the larger context of the organization and its environment. As with a leader, a manager must also set a common goal and have people that will follow him because a manager who is alone is not a manager at all. The competencies and expectations of a leader are distinctly aligned with the role of a university president, who must be adaptable and communicative in a constantly changing environment in order to make effective decisions. As such, this study will focus on leadership rather than management as it relates to the tenure of a university presidency and the position's times of choice.

The current research and theory surrounding unsuccessful leaders exists with the goal that leaders will read these articles and books and learn retrospectively from the failures of others. These works fail to take into account the uniqueness of each leader, each organization, and each moment in time. There is no secret pathway or silver bullet to developing into a perfect leader. No leader exists in a vacuum and studying leadership as phenomena where one set of values will work in every situation is not practical or realistic (Bennis, 2007). When Finkelstein (2004) makes a list of habits that are typical of unsuccessful executives it is only helpful to an organization if, 1) it is read by their particular leader, 2) the leader is introspective enough to actually see their own actions reflected in the list of habits, 3) the habits prove to be negative for that leader in that organization at that moment in time. Lists such as these are read less than books about the habits and characteristics of successful leaders but they may not be any more effective

(Finkelstein, 2004). Many leaders who have been incredibly successful early in their careers are still failing at an alarming rate and yet management books continue to be produced and read by these and other leaders (Conger and Nadler, 2004).

### **Decision-Making Processes**

University presidents make any number of decisions every day and even every hour. It is important to understand how and if their approach to these decisions changes over time in office and what leads to this change. While there has been significant research on decision-making processes and an equally robust body of research exists about tenure, there have not been attempts to merge these two bodies of work together. This study will provide greater clarity about how university presidents change during their tenure in office specifically related to decision-making processes. Like any leader, “making important and difficult decisions comes with the territory” (Sanaghan, et al, 2008, p. 30) and how decisions are made evolves throughout a president’s time in office. The ever-changing internal and external environments that must be managed create uncertainty that must be managed and no decision is ever exactly the same as the last. There has also been a growing contention that the university presidency have become unbearable and the pressures upon the president have become too numerous while the rewards were becoming too few. This growing concern about presidents, their tenure, how they make decisions, and the pressures they face is an area where there is much more to learn. Understanding this gap in the knowledge about presidents and how they make decisions over time in office has significance for universities and many organizations. Examining the presidents’ decision-making processes through the lens of

the seasons of a CEO theory (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991) will offer greater understanding of the interaction and relationship of these phenomena.

There are innumerable types of decisions, including policy decisions, product decisions, process decisions, routine and non-routine decisions, in addition to calculated decisions (Schmidt, 1958). Each decision is “embedded in a rich context of other decisions, outcomes, and experiences” (Ludvig, Madan, and Spetch, 2014, p. 147) and thus takes on a life of its own. Strategic decisions take on a different set of challenges to include pace, significance of the outcome, and the public nature of the situation, which calls for strategic leadership to cope with the constantly changing environment that exists today (Hagen, Hassan, and Amin, 1998). These types of decisions can affect the future direction and success of an institution (Frances, Huxel, Meyerson, and Park, 1987) and are later broken down into ten areas by which all of these decisions exist in the higher education setting.

A study by the Association of Governing Boards (2006) entitled *The Leadership Imperative* provides insight into the higher education leadership challenge when it states “that colleges and universities continue to face impediments in their efforts to achieve effective governance and sustain capable leadership” (p. vi). The “conflicting pressures a president must confront” and the “uneven guidance, support, and oversight from their governing boards” (*The Leadership Imperative*, p. vi) makes the presidency even more challenging every day. Additionally, while a president may seek a great deal of input and perspective regarding strategic choices at the beginning of their tenure, an “overconfidence” at the end of their tenure often prevents them from gathering this input (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991 and Miller 1991).

Even in the best of situations, the decision-making landscape does not allow a leader to “detachedly comprehend all facets of their situations, assess all options, and then select one that has a textbook correctness. Instead executives take mental shortcuts, often gravitating to the familiar, and the tried and true. “Certainly, they are greatly swayed by their experiences” (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996, p. 41). Each of the presidents in this study have approached their strategic decisions differently and, as noted in the upper echelons model (Hambrick, 1994), no two leaders will come to same set of options or select the same resolution even when presented with the same scenario, resources, and environment. As such, this research focuses on the broad concept of decision-making processes instead of selecting one model to apply to each of the unique subjects in the study. The experiences of these presidents combined with important, strategic situations make up the area of study for this research and thus the value of the outcome of the research.

### **Succession and Transition**

As the end goal of all organizations is success throughout time and despite changes in leadership, understanding how leaders change over time has great significance. Succession and the processes of exiting and entering an organization have been extensively researched. Although this research does frame the experiences of CEPS, it omits the bulk of a CEO’s tenure. A strong and well-managed succession process is important financially and for the overall value and success of the organization. A poorly managed, or too frequent, transition process could lead to a loss in important competitive advantages. Gaining an understanding of these factors along with understanding how

tenure affects decisions made by presidents will significantly contribute to closing the gap in research and literature.

Higher education institutions across the country spend millions of dollars every year in compensating their presidents. Additionally, when a president leaves, they spend significant funds selecting a new president to oversee their institution. Research has shown that we are at a critical point in history wherein the average age of presidents is 61 and 58% of current presidents are over the age of 60 (The American College President, 2012). This signals that a large number of presidents will be retiring in the next few years since less than 5% of presidents stay in office after the age of 70 (American College President, 2012).

There is a lack of research and study of executive leadership utilizing “time-based theories and methods” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) and providing that insight through this study will help to close the gap. As the number of institutions that utilize external firms to hire presidents continues to grow (American College President, 2012), so does the cost and the expectations for that new leader. As presidents are increasingly hired from outside academia and more lawyers and business-oriented leaders are finding their way to the president’s desk, we simultaneously find a continually shifting environment for presidents (American College President, 2012).

In selecting a president, there can be a dilemma about whether to hire someone for the current challenges or for the future. Initial successes can lead to entrenchment and “erode the match between organization and environment” (Miller, 1991, p. 35). Many organizations that are facing immediate challenges will select an external candidate as their CEO with the purpose of initiating significant change and addressing the present

issues (Shen & Cannella, 2002). This approach can lead to greater issues later if the selected CEO is not appropriate for managing an organization beyond the initial set of challenges. Research on CEOs finds that the main reasons they fail can fit into one or more of the following six causes:

1. Chose not to cope with innovation and change
2. Misread the competition
3. Brilliantly fulfilled the wrong vision
4. Clung to an inaccurate view of reality
5. Ignored vital information
6. Identified too closely with the company (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 1)

All of these causes are present in the work of Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991), align with the Seasons theory, and are often tied to how a president's approach changes during their time in office.

In addition to the above list from the corporate world, Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue (2013) identified four factors of failure to include "failure to meet business objectives, problems with interpersonal relationships, inability to lead key constituents, and difficulty adapting" (p. 9). These were adapted to what they have learned about the higher education environment and became the list of six themes of a university president's failure:

1. Ethical lapses
2. Poor interpersonal skills
3. Inability to lead key constituencies
4. Difficulty adapting

5. Failure to meet business objectives

6. Board shortcomings (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Bogue, 2013, p. 8)

These themes speak to the different environment present in higher education as compared to other types of corporate organizations.

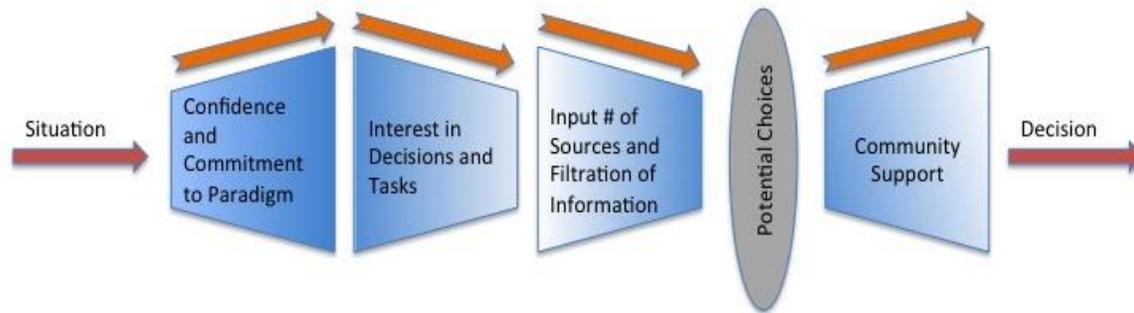
It is quite easy, especially for universities facing significant and present issues, to hire someone particularly skilled at addressing the “right now” issues but presidents are meant to serve beyond a moment of strategic decision. Vancil (1987) shares that presidents are made to believe that they are selected on the basis of the appropriateness of their apparent paradigms – their schemas and repertoires – to the company’s particular situation and environment. This will be further discussed later but it can often be challenging when a president is hired to address a particular issue or challenge because they may not be equipped beyond that immediate issue and time period. This can then lead to a presidential failure despite the fact that they may have successfully addressed the issue that led to their hiring in the first place. There are few people that would identify a presidency that lasts less than five years as a success.

Presidents, in general, are meant to have long tenures and leave a legacy as part of the long and distinguished history of a university. Continual turnover of presidents can “tax the adaptability of faculty and administrators” and “result in slower change and less responsiveness throughout the institution” (Padilla and Ghosh, 2000, p. 37). Buildings are named for presidents, scholarships are created in their memory, and universities will often harken back to the past successes of leaders for years and decades into the future. With the exception of a select few famed CEO’s, this is unlike many businesses and is

another distinction that separates the pressures of a university president from those of a CEO.

The value and importance of an organization's leader is rarely debated but Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) go further to say that their "Seasons" theory can help to understand and explain organizational performance throughout a president's tenure. They believe that "performance very early and very late in the tenure will be lower" (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991, p. 732). This is because at the beginning the tenure the president is focused on a particular mandate provided to them and lacks the general understanding of the university required to be fully effective. Eitzen and Yetman's (1972) study of NCAA basketball coaches provided the initial background for Hambrick and Fukutomi's (1991) theory and gave further insight into organizational performance and its tie to the president. They found that a coach that takes over a losing team will typically have greater success and a coach taking over a winning team will usually struggle to find initial success. They further go on to note, "it is only after ten years, that the improvement is substantial" (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 114) and thus it is very challenging to predict success or failure effectively on the outset. In fact, as the tenure of presidents continues to shrink, less and less presidents are in office long enough to go through all five of the "seasons."

**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework**



This diagram illustrates how a president's approach to decision-making changes and adapts over time. When a situation occurs, there are a number of filters the information goes through prior to reaching a decision. Each of these filters change and evolve over time and impact each other and the final decision that is made. A president's confidence and commitment to their paradigm increases over time and this is the first filter. The second filter is the decreasing interest a president has in decisions and tasks. The third filter is the decreasing number of information sources and the growing filtration of information from those sources. This leads to the choices a president has to consider based on the situation and the previous filters. The number of potential sources will decrease over time as presidents rely more and more on past decisions and previous successes. The final filter is the growing support for the President and their approach to leading the institution. This then leads to a final decision the president will make regarding the situation.

Adapted from Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996)

### **Theoretical Foundation**

This study is based on a constructionist epistemology, using a basic qualitative methodology and a narrative inquiry based design. Hambrick and Fukutomi's five seasons of tenure describe the life cycle of changes to a CEO over their time in office. While the theory has been tested empirically (Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Mooney, 2005), no studies have applied these concepts in an educational setting. Most research on CEOs has focused solely on either the beginning or end of tenure. John Gabarro's (1987) *The Dynamics of Taking Charge* and *When a New Manager Takes Charge* (1985, 2007) provide empirical data to help inform the beginning of the Seasons theory. Danny Miller's (1991) "Stale in the Saddle" further supports the end of the Seasons theory and his articles with Peter Friesen (1982, 1984) address corporate life cycle and provide

greater context to this study. How leaders approach strategic decisions throughout their time in office is important to understand and the Seasons theory provides a framework for analysis and greater understanding.

### **Summary of Methodology**

The research for this study will be conducted through interviews and narrative inquiry with presidents in order to gain a first-hand narrative of their experiences. This method is the best way to examine and understand how the presidents' decision-making processes evolved over time through a discussion of the challenges they faced and how their approach altered. Merriam (2009) describes narrative analysis as a way to study an individual's experience through their stories, as this is the way they "make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us" (p. 32 and 202). Stories are holistic and powerful and how an individual shares a story in regard to language, expression, and their "voice" (Van De Ven, 2007, p. 224) can be just as important as the words used to tell the story itself (Merriam, 2009; Van De Ven, 2007; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Webster and Mertova, 2007). The power and value of narrative inquiry through the collection strategy of interviews will provide a more complete picture of each president's experiences and a more information-rich set of data for analysis.

All interviews will be conducted over the phone using a recorded conference call line. While a number of these presidents may be accessible in person, to ensure consistency in how data is collected across all subjects, it is important that all interviews be administered over the phone. Each subject will be provided information ahead of time so they can prepare to discuss four strategic decisions of their choosing from four time

periods (first year, early tenure, mid tenure, and final year) of their presidency. This will allow each subject to select situations and prepare thoughts so as to provide the most comprehensive information possible in the interview. Providing the context of the interview in advance should also allow the interviews to be more efficient and allow us more time for discussion in the limited time available. The format will be a one-hour, semi-structured interview with specific questions and allowance for follow up based on the unique experiences of each president that will require further inquiries and clarifications.

Presidents will be identified using a purposeful sampling technique to achieve a sample of 8-10 former university presidents. Presidents who are retired or have announced their retirement in the next year and whose last presidency was at least 10 years in length will be the subjects of this inquiry. The justification for a 10 year tenure is that Hambrick and Fukutomi's (1991) Seasons theory "describes a lengthy CEO tenure" (p. 720) and notes that someone who leaves a role in four or five years has "not had a chance to achieve peak performance on the job" (p. 738). The work of Miller (1991) also notes that CEOs can learn for a decade or more before the firm begins to show signs of decline and the season of dysfunction takes hold as the CEO becomes "tired, enshrined, and stale" (p. 41).

The selection of retired presidents allows them to examine their tenure retrospectively without the distraction of too many current tasks and decisions. In an effort to focus the inquiry, this study will examine only presidents that served at what the Carnegie Foundation terms "doctorate-granting institutions" or "Master's Colleges and Universities." These classifications are designed to help researchers "identify groups of

roughly comparable institutions” (<http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org>) in order to categorize the hundreds of institutions across the United States. Narrowing the focus to these two categories removes a number of institutions, including special focus institutions, tribal colleges, and associates colleges. This will provide greater similarities among the presidents’ experiences to better compare the experiences of all subjects in a similar setting. The list of presidents will come from presidents known to the researcher, recommendations from the dissertation committee, and those found through research and reading about presidents and tenure.

### **Limitations**

A qualitative study will not allow the results to be generalized across all presidencies, universities, and contexts. However, the information will provide a better understanding about this particular phenomenon within the university context.

**Table 1: Definition of Key Terms**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>Tenure</b>	Total length of time an individual is in the prescribed role of CEO/President	Grusky, 1963, p. 21; Eitzen and Yetman, 1972, p. 112-114
<b>Paradigm</b>	Combination of both schema and repertoire	Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991, p. 721
<b>CEO/President</b>	An individual selected/appointed to lead an organization at the senior-most level	
<b>Seasons</b>	A relatively stable series of periods or stages within the life cycle each with its own time and character that is both distinct and similar to the	Levinson, 1978

	other seasons. A season is relatively stable while still being based in change and having its own time and importance	
<b>Decision-making process</b>	Process by which options are considered and the best course of action is determined	Vroom, Jago, 2007
<b>Life Cycle</b>	A process or journey that has a particular character and follows a basic sequence from beginning to end	Levinson, 1978
<b>Schema</b>	Preexisting knowledge system that a manager brings to an administrative situation, including conscious and unconscious preconceptions, beliefs, inferences, and expectations	Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991, p. 721

## Chapter 2

### CEOs and Businesses

Throughout history, CEOs have been portrayed in a number of ways, including heroes, villains, scapegoats, and many other roles. In fact, most CEOs exist without us ever taking notice. For every Jack Welch or Steve Jobs, there are thousands of other CEOs that never garner attention. The CEO is an often-misunderstood role in an organization and has even been compared to Machiavelli's *Prince* by Kendall D'Andrade (1993). His comparisons of the ruler, the nobles, and the ruled as compared to the CEO, middle management, and all other employees raises a number of questions about the CEO role and the perception of the individuals in the role. Although their methods of handling issues and problems are different, there is a similarity which suggests that even today there are many ways to view a CEO.

There continues to be debate about the true impact of the CEO on both individuals and overall organizational performance (Meyer, 1975; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Beatty and Zajac, 1987). There are just as many studies that defend the value and importance of a CEO as there are studies that seek to prove otherwise. Many of these debates identified the key role of a top executive to be establishing, managing, and conveying organizational meaning (Barnard, 1938; Jonas, Fry, Srivastva, 1990). This perspective, in many ways, separates a CEO from the role of leadership and establishes their focus as a communicator and face of an organization only. The research on succession events illustrates clearly that a CEO does, in fact, have a direct effect on the success or failure of an organization (Beatty and Zajac, 1987; Eitzen and Yetman, 1972; Elsaid and Ursel, 2009; Miller, 1993; Grusky, 1963; Smith, Carson, and Alexander,

1984). The work of Smith, Carson, and Alexander (1984) identified very clearly that effective leaders “definitely made a difference across multiple criterion measures and across several organizational units” (p. 774). Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) attempt to end this debate with their research and their finding that:

Executives make different kinds of choices. Sometimes, the choices are bold and quantum; sometimes they are incremental; sometimes they maintain the status quo; and sometimes they are not choices at all, but rather a failure to generate and consider choices. But managers act. They act on the basis of their own highly idiosyncratic experiences, repertoires, aspirations, knowledge of alternatives, and values (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996, p. 22-23).

While this debate will continue, the research identified here illustrates enough evidence to presume that managerial effect exists and that, good or bad, CEOs make a difference to their organization.

Chester Barnard’s seminal work *The Functions of the Executive* (1933, 1968) in many ways became the starting point in defining the role of an organization’s leader. While today his list of executive functions may seem simplistic and antiquated, at the time they started a conversation and discussion that continues even today. The functions as presented are “to provide a system of communication, to promote the securing of essential efforts, and to formulate and define purpose” (p. 217). These functions are relevant here because they tend to be similar for both CEO’s and presidents, and seem to be the basis for many of the functions of a modern CEO. These functions have transformed over the years to a need to plan, organize, control, and command (Jonas, Fry, Srivastva, 1989, 1990), and have also grown to a larger role of “managing meaning”

(Jonas, Fry, Srivastva, 1990, p. 36) for an organization. In the study done by Jonas, Fry, and Srivastava (1990) CEOs identify three main pieces of the executive agenda as creating a context for change, building commitment and ownership, and balancing stability and innovation (Jonas, Fry, Srivastva, 1990, p. 37).

In the world of business, as in the world of higher education, change is the one constant that leaders must be prepared for and skilled at managing. While the focus was once on the CEO to “solve problems, make rules, police systems, adjudicate conflicts and command the action of others”, they have now evolved into the role of “sense maker” (Jones, Fry, Srivastva, 1990, p. 45). Many CEOs actually note that one of the driving factors in their work was “the chance to see if they could successfully lead a major organizational change, or carry one out begun by their predecessor” (Jonas, Fry, Srivastva, 1990, p. 37). All three aspects of the executive agenda are relevant in this study examining decision-making over time. The university president’s role will “always be different from a corporate CEO’s” (Wecker, 2014, p. 14). However, both CEOs and presidents must be equipped to the three main aspects of the executive agenda as defined in Jonas, Fry, and Srivastava’s 1990 study. Furthermore, Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) wrote their paper with the concept that the “seasons model may apply to managers at all levels” suggesting that application of the model to a university context is well within its design.

The CEO is the established and recognized leader of his or her organization and they have a range of different tasks and expectations. The same can be said for presidents and the correlation between the two positions is underscored by the acknowledgement that managing constant change is an essential role for both CEOs and

presidents. There is abundant evidence that both have an effect on both the day-to-day and long-term success of an organization and are worth further study.

### **University Presidents**

The differences between CEOs and presidents often begin with the environments and cultures in which they work and the number and types of “publics or stakeholders” they each must work with on a daily basis (Padilla, 2005). The university president must be responsible to an incredible number of constituents. A typical CEO has to focus primarily on the happiness of a board and in many ways, “what the board says goes,” (Asghar, 2013). Conversely, a university president has significantly more constituencies that must be managed, convinced, and even placated at times. While a CEO most often faces employees, media, competitors, stockholders, and customers, university presidents must manage more than 10 different entities that drive and influence their organization including; faculty, students, trustees, business leaders, general public, parents, foundations/donors, media, politicians, and other universities (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2014). This incredible number of constituents applies pressure unlike any other type of organization and must be led by someone willing and able to be many things to many people, simultaneously. To that point, a 2013 Forbes article stated “leaders in other sectors have much they can learn from good higher education governance” (Asghar, p. 1).

As the financial and political pressures facing presidents take on a decidedly corporate tone, presidents have had to shift their focus to be more like that of a CEO (Witt/Kieffer, 2013, p. 1). Success for a president is difficult to define compared to a CEO whose profit margin or stock price can often be clear indications of success or

failure. A president must manage the expectations of a large and diverse constituency and find ways to serve each of their needs in order to achieve success (Bornstein, 2003, p18). The structure of a university differs from that of a typical business, which has led to previous divergences between the two positions, however more and more we find the two positions to be similar. John Silber (as cited in Bornstein, 2003) identifies a number of similarities:

University presidents, live about as far from the ivory tower as one can imagine. They raise funds to balance budgets that may exceed half a billion dollars, negotiate with unions, cope with the individualisms of the professoriate and the irrepressible ingenuity of students. Quite apart from their educational responsibilities, the presidents of large universities are the chief executive officers of hotels and restaurants; they arrange the financing and supervise the construction of multimillion-dollar projects; they deal with thousands of federal and state regulations; they operate police departments large enough to meet the needs of small cities. (p. 17-18)

Additionally, a study by Witt/Kieffer (2013) found that presidents and CEOs scored quite similarly on both the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI) and the Hogan Development Survey (HDS) with the only notable divergence arising from the responses to do with motivation and core values (p. 1-5). Presidents had higher scores in aesthetic, altruism, science, and tradition and scored lower in both commerce and hedonism on the Motives, Values, Preferences Inventory (MVPI) scale (Witt/Kieffer, 2013, p. 5). This indicates that although the positions continue to converge, the path and reason for taking on each role remains different in many ways. While motivation to take on the role of

CEO or president may differ, the focus of this study on decision-making and tenure are not impacted by these differences. Another aspect of the presidency is that it has even been thought of as a “spiritual vocation” and as a “calling,” akin to the clergy (Bornstein, 2003, p. 17). The functionality and challenges of the two roles remain strongly correlated and the positions and responsibilities of each maintain many consistent and shared goals, purposes, and values that allow the research on CEOs to be considered within the context of this study.

### **History of Universities**

Universities are unique, historic, and significant organizations in the world. They are at once both ancient and modern and have the struggle of balancing these two realities. Of the 75 “enterprises and organizations” that existed 500 hundred years ago in some form similar to how they look today, 61 of these organizations are universities (Padilla, 2005). Some of these institutions have existed nearly one thousand years and still stand with similar goals and some of them even continue to use the same buildings (p. 12). The age of universities has not limited them in their role in society as “they are now the country’s chief supplier of new discoveries in science, technology, and other fields of inquiry” (Bok, 2013) and a driving force in a range of fields.

Access to higher learning has also changed dramatically. Less than five percent of Americans attended college between 1700 and 1900. That number rose to 20% between the World Wars and to 50% in the 70s (Komives, Dudley, and Assoc., 1996). While this percentage increased, so did the total number of people, thus leading to an incredible amount of growth in universities even in just the last one hundred years. This is combined with a feeling that universities are “lumbering elephants, resistant to change

and glacially bureaucratic in movement, and harder to move than a graveyard” (Padilla, 2005). However, much of the innovation in the modern world has occurred within the agile and quick to adapt internal aspects of a university setting. Universities supply the “knowledge and ideas that create new industries, protect us from disease, preserve and enrich our culture, and inform us about our history, our environment, our society, and ourselves” (Bok, 2013).

This essential role in society cannot be denied or overstated and despite this incredible undertaking, the leadership of all of these organizations continues to fall on the president’s shoulders alone. The historical pressure places a different type of pressure and expectation on a president than most CEOs. There are businesses and corporations that change the world every day, however, there are few, if any, that are expected to have both the longevity and impact of a university. Although the expectations and outcomes of universities and businesses differ, their context as large entities with many moving parts in a global and constantly changing environment make them appropriate for the comparisons made within this study of their leaders.

### **Structure and Culture of Universities**

Universities are not a typical commerce-focused business and they have a different structure than almost every other type of organization. They are balancing a “long history, couched in tradition with a capacity for rapid adaptability” (Padilla, 2005) and this leads to a remarkable level of complexity. The role of a university president is incredibly multifaceted as the “scale and diversity of the contemporary university” is considered to be “comparable to that of major global corporations or government agencies” (Duderstadt, 2007). Universities are often challenged to “teach students,

conduct research on various clients, provide health care, engage in economic development, stimulate social change, and provide mass entertainment (college sports)” (p. 105). These diverse and often contrary roles make for an organization, and thus a leadership position, like no other.

There is a natural and important competitiveness within the American higher education system that differentiates the U.S. from other countries (Rosovsky, 1990). This competitiveness brings a number of negatives, including diminished loyalty of faculty, valuing “market power” subjects, and a focus on short-term gains rather than future-oriented planning and implementation (p. 31-32). Simultaneously, the competitive nature of American higher education is at the root of our continued evolution, growth as a field, and focus on innovation.

In examining the difference between a typical corporation and a university, Kerr and Gade (1989) provide an extensive look at how they differ:

- Faculty – Tenure and academic freedom.
- Students – not a single-service customer – on site at all times with control over their own time and choices. The corporation also does not have alumni.
- Organization – corporations follows a vertical structure while a university must also consider the horizontal aspects of hierarchy.
- Board makeup – many corporations have boards comprised of operating officers chosen by the CEO while government officials often choose university boards.
- CEO time – presidents have less control over how their time is spent and many social and cultural obligations.

- Support system – the presidency is often a very lonely endeavor with few internal supports in comparison to the life of a CEO.
- Decisions – corporations can move quickly while university systems can forestall some decisions indefinitely.
- Campus – few corporations have the responsibility of a business as well as a mini-town/city as most presidents must manage

Despite these seemingly negative differences between higher education and the corporate world, there are a number of areas that are a positive difference. There tends to be a higher level of loyalty in higher education than in the corporate world and universities are often more immune or insulated with regard to rapid technology and market shifts (Kerr and Gade, 1989, p. 40). This internal agility and external insulation is a constant balancing act for a university president and has been compared to that of being a mayor (Kerr and Gade, 1989, p. 41). Many of the larger corporations in America such as Dell, Nike, Heinz, Apple, Hilton, and Google will have distinct similarities to universities due to their size and complexity; their CEOs could also be compared to a mayor of a town or city. These structural and cultural similarities validate the correlation of businesses and universities in this study and reinforce the use of research on CEOs and presidents interchangeably.

### **Governance of Universities**

Clark Kerr has described the university as “unitary” in that the president is ultimately in charge (as cited in Rosovsky, 1990). The president “needs to speak the language of the academy” and has to “work in collaboration with the faculty, the senior leadership team, the board, and other institutional stakeholders to lead a process of

formulating an institutional vision” (*The Leadership Imperative*, 2006, p. 3). This report goes further and states, “the president oversees a ship in which there is a little space for navigational error” (*The Leadership Imperative*, 2006, p. 3). Governing boards at universities have an incredible level of responsibility for the number constituents they serve. These boards are “accountable to the public trust and to the institution, its mission, core values, and the academic community” (*The Leadership Imperative*, 2006, p. 23) and must work regularly and consistently with the president of their institution. The governing board has ultimate authority over the institution, which is exercised through their roles of selecting and removing presidents, approving the budget, and participation “in discussions about the university’s future plans while exercising ultimate supervisory powers over the affairs of the institution” (Bok, 2013).

The ancient nature of universities adds to the complexity of their functioning and structure. They have a number of different constituents including faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, community members, and governmental agencies and officials. Universities are simultaneously large and small and fast and slow. To external observers, universities “often appear as lumbering elephants, resistant to change and glacially bureaucratic in movement” (Padilla, 2005) but internally “the pace of the university is at times frenzied, gripped with intellectual debates and with the excitement of discovery” (p. 13). The governance of universities is further complicated by the fact that there are the innumerable stakeholders, or “publics,” that all have a vested interest in the university. Within one university there are any number of different governance structures that can best be described as shared governance (Bok, 2013). Examples of this shared governance and “publics” are the governing board, faculty senate, student leadership,

local governments and community groups, alumni boards, parent boards, and university administration. All of the combined factors noted above create a unique and special governance situation within universities compared to other types of organizations and further underscore the value in researching presidents.

### **Unique Nature of the President's Role**

The president's role is a unique one that must simultaneously balance tradition and innovation. Woodrow Wilson served as the president of Princeton University from 1902-1910 and after his career as President of the United States he commented that "he had learned nothing new about politics after leaving the university (Clements, as cited in Padilla, 2005, p. 2). The political nature of a university is most similar to that of a mayor of a large city where the leader must manage a myriad of tasks and constantly make decisions that affect stakeholders both directly and indirectly (Bornstein, 2003, p. 17-19; Cohen and March, 1974, p. 29-30). The rich histories of universities provide both the value of tradition and the weight of expectation that many CEOs don't have to carry with them on a daily basis. Bornstein (2003) identifies the unique nature of preparation to become a university president as "not a typical profession for which an aspirant can prepare through specific education and training. Unlike lawyers, doctors, military professionals, and the clergy, presidents hold the prestige and status of their position only as long as they inhabit the office" (p. 17).

Traditionally, past presidents have been seen as people who were "sound, weren't going to change us too radically, and who would participate in the continuity of the institution" (Trachtenberg, as cited in Darden, 2009). In the past universities did not seek change agents, but increasingly, institutions are specifically seeking presidents who

will see not only what exists, but what is possible. As the traditional ladder to the presidency shifts away from only selecting former faculty members (American College President, 1990), there are a number of different types of leaders entering this role. In 2012, 52% of all presidents came from within higher education (American College President, 2012). In 2006, that number was only 37%, illustrating a significant trend toward external hiring practices (p. 73). This brings a different type of president into higher education and demands a new way of examining the presidency.

Even candidates rising from within higher education have increasingly taken different paths to the presidency than in previous years. In 1990, 25% of presidents had never been full-time faculty members and only a quarter of all presidents had taught for 11 years or more (American College President 1990). In the 2012 study, 30% of presidents had never been a member of the faculty and there was consistency in that only 25% had taught for more than 11 years (American College President, 2012). Also notable is that 28% of all presidents had 10 years or less of experience in administration and of that number, 10% had zero years' experience (p. 72). Finally, 73% of presidents were in their first presidency (p. 72), which is a marked difference from 1990 when 83% were first-time presidents (American College President, 1990).

The challenges inherent in a university presidency “test the abilities of leaders as perhaps no other modern organization does due to significant constraints upon, and challenges to, the power and autonomy of university leaders” (Padilla, 2005). The university setting has been described as an “organized anarchy” as it exhibits the properties of “problematic goals, unclear technology, and fluid participation” (Cohen and March, 1974, p. 2-3). These elements may not be completely unique to a university but it

does make a university difficult to “describe, understand, and lead” (Cohen and March, 1974, p. 3). Presidents are asked to “identify policy alternatives, recommend policy decisions, identify upcoming issues, make administrative decisions, and solve problems” (Frances, Huxel, Meyerson, and Park, 1987, p. 61) all while managing the outward image of the institution and all of its varied constituents. The breadth and depth of the role of a president is beyond what many people can be trained to do and in fact, in most other countries, the role of a university president is much more narrow and limited in both scope and authority (Rosovsky, 1990; Kerr and Gade, 1989).

In his book *Big Man on Campus*, President Emeritus Stephen Joel Trachtenberg (2008) explained that based on the expectations he has encountered in his career, a “university president must have these important qualities:”

- the iron endurance of Cal Ripken;
- the intellect of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the last man to know everything;
- the money sense of J. Pierpont Morgan;
- the inventiveness of Thomas Alva Edison;
- the spontaneous rhetorical ability of Winston Churchill;
- the diplomacy of Dag Hammarskjold or maybe Bismarck;
- the ability of Harry Houdini to get out of tight situations;
- the conciliatory powers of Abraham Lincoln;
- the storytelling talent of Stephen King;
- the loving kindness of Mother Teresa;
- the virtue above suspicion of Caesar’s wife;
- the luck of the Irish;

- the patience of Job (p. 37-38).

One can see how seemingly impossible it would be to have all of these qualities and even more difficult to possess them in significant enough quantity and balance to truly be effective. However, this list helps to fully frame the challenge inherent in the role of a university president.

The research done by the American Council on Education, titled “The American College President,” has helped to shed light on this role and all it entails since the first study in 1986. In the most recent study conducted in 2011, presidents were asked to comment on their preparedness for 20 “duties and institution” related areas (American College President, 2012). There are few positions in any field that expect a leader to have expertise and time to successfully address this many areas. The full list of “duties and institution” related areas includes:

- academic issues;
- accountability/assessment of student learning;
- athletics;
- budget/financial management;
- capital improvement projects;
- enrollment management;
- entrepreneurial ventures;
- faculty issues;
- personnel issues;
- fundraising;
- community relations;
- governing board relations;
- government relations;
- media/public relations;
- risk management/legal issues;
- crisis management;
- strategic planning;
- student life/conduct issues;
- technology planning; and
- campus internationalization (p. 77).

This is a daunting list of duties and knowledge for anyone to handle and yet these are typical areas that every president must be prepared to address and manage. The five areas that presidents expressed the least preparedness or comfort with are fundraising, risk management and legal issues, capital improvement projects, budget and financial management, and entrepreneurial ventures. Although many of these deficiencies can be addresses and managed by a highly skilled senior management team, fundraising continues to be an expectation that falls directly on the shoulders of a president. This is illustrated by the fact that 38% of presidents say that it is the one activity that takes up the most time amongst everything they do.

Everything presented in this section highlights the unique nature of the university presidency and the need to better understand it. As some of the oldest institutions in the world, these organizations are entrusted with the legacy and tradition as much as with the present and future. It is the rare person who makes a significant and legitimate impact in the world today who does not attend and graduate from college. The responsibility and unique challenges of that are a truly daunting task for a university president. Balancing all of their many roles and incredible number of constituents is a challenge to be respected and valued beyond many other professions.

### **Succession**

Succession is an important topic of discussion and research and it has been studied extensively over the last forty years (Pitcher, Chreim, and Kisfalvi, 2000). It is a difficult subject to fully understand due to an overwhelming number of factors that contribute to each and every succession event and because of the secrecy that often surrounds these processes (Lorsch & Khurana, 2009). At its most basic, a succession is a

traumatic event which impacts all aspects of the organization and those that exist within it and rely upon it (Kesner & Sebor, 1994).

For each succession there are innumerable potential variables, including how a current leader is leaving the role (voluntarily, retirement, being fired, etc.), whether the successor is internal or external, the current state of the organization, state of the board, and many more. The large number of variables makes understanding the processes of succession and transition incredibly difficult. The effects of a succession event are felt at all levels and in different ways by every constituent, which further complicates efforts to understand the process and to plan for it effectively. Despite these challenges, there have been an overwhelming number of theorists and researchers who have attempted to understand this process from both the individual and organizational perspective.

Oscar Grusky is widely acknowledged as one of the first individuals to study succession in a systematic way. He determined the importance of this area of study since “administrative succession always leads to organizational instability and it is a phenomenon that all organizations must cope with” (Grusky, 1960, p. 105). The effects of these events are both immediate and long-term, and understanding “when and why university presidents leave their office helps to understand how universities deal with changes in their external environment and how they translate these changes into their internal organizational structures (Robken, 2007, p. 139). As succession is a process that is inevitable in every organization, it is important to understand it and gain insight into what happened leading up to and following a succession event.

Succession planning is common practice in the world of business and has become more commonplace in higher education in the last few decades (Wallin,

Cameron, & Sharples, 2005). Many failed CEOs can be linked directly to an organization's inability to develop and maintain an "effective CEO succession plan" (Freeman, 2004). It can often take the form of "targeted leadership development that promotes a culture of learning, growing, and collaboration within the institution" (Freeman, 2004, p. 25) and provides a more thoughtful approach to the long-term success and survival of an institution. Maxwell notes the importance of leadership development and succession planning when he states, "the asset that truly appreciates within an organization is people. Systems become dated. Buildings deteriorate. Machinery wears out. But people can grow, develop, and become more effective if they have a leader who understands their potential value." (as cited in Wallin et al., 2005, p. 25-26).

This study will provide a brief overview of different types of succession that can occur, but overall, the types and manners of succession will not be utilized a great deal in this study. One major aspect of succession is whether a successor is internal or external, noting that neither internal nor external successors are guaranteed to take an organization in the right direction. Kesner and Sebor (1994) make a distinction that internal and external successors should also be considered in relation to whether the individual "came from within or outside the industry" (p. 335) and not just whether they were previously employed in the organization. Further distinctions between education and the corporate world is that there is typically less succession planning in education and a more frequent tendency to hire external candidates (Wecker, 2014, p. 16).

Research has shown that in 2003, "55% of outside CEOs who departed were forced to resign, compared with 34% of insiders" (Charan, 2005, p. 74). Furthermore, "two out of five CEOs fail in their first 18 months" (Charan, 2005, p. 125) and a great

deal of the blame is shared by organizations that lack a strong succession pipeline and boards that do not make hard decisions in their selection processes. A *Harvard Business Review* study in 1999 presented the confounding notion that if a “company was in a crisis, going outside yielded better long-term business results. If the company was not in a crisis, staying inside yielded better results” (as cited in Davis, 1999). As there is no clear-cut data illustrating whether internal or external successors are a better choice for an organization, it is better to highlight the challenges and benefits of both types of succession as context for this study.

One of the challenges of the external CEO is that they are typically brought in at a time of struggle or needed change in an organization and bring along with them their own team (Eitzen & Yetman, 1972; Charan, 2005). Although this change may be necessary, it is a significant disruption and may cause a lack of focus. If the external CEO is unsuccessful then a large number of people will have to be removed again as a result (Charan, 2005). There can also be negative ramifications for the morale of an organization when going external and there can be a noteworthy lag in momentum while an external successor gets comfortable in the organization (Davis, 1999).

Equally as challenging can be the internal succession process and results. Hiring internally is still the more typical process with only about one third of all CEOs of large, public corporations being external to the organization when hired (Khurana, 2001; Citrin & Ogden, 2010). There can be times that insiders pose an even greater risk despite often being seen as a safer choice (Charan, 2005). The internal “horse race” that can exist in an internal process can be damaging both during and after the search is completed as the organization reacts to the selection of one internal candidate over others (Davis,

1999). Many believe that external candidates are the way to go in a time of challenge, however, when an organization is thriving it has been shown that an internal successor can help continue down the established path (Charan, 2005). Citrin and Ogden (2010) actually found that the least successful CEOs were those that they dubbed “insider-outsiders” and came to the organization externally and took the reins of the CEO role within 18 months.

Whether a successor is internal or external to the organization, the impact of following either a voluntary or involuntary process of succession is important to consider. CEOs can depart through either a voluntary or involuntary process and each of these can take on many different forms. Retirement, accepting a new position, or simply deciding to take on a new role in the organization, or embarking on a new career path are all examples of a voluntary process. An involuntary process typically takes the form of firing, forced resignation, or forced retirement and organizations are broad in their discussions and explanations of the departure. Wiersema’s (2009) research found that from 1997-1998, 71% of all successions were involuntary to include outright dismissals or early retirements. This is striking compared to research from the 1980s that showed involuntary departures as low as 13-36% (Weirsema, 2009, p. 21).

The involuntary or voluntary nature of departure can shape how the succession process is handled and managed. Many successions happen as a surprise whether they are voluntary or involuntary and this can put significant pressure on an organization to rush a succession process (Khurana, 2001). This can be even more dangerous in the case of an involuntary departure, as the organization must quickly establish faith and trust in those that are a part of the organization by putting a new leader in place immediately. It

is characteristic that a voluntary process would be handled over a longer period of time so while there is no rush, a voluntary process is emblematic of a popular and successful CEO whose shadow looms large over those that may follow.

The manner in which a successor is perceived, welcomed, and supported can significantly impact both the short and long-term success of an organization. The well-examined succession process provides a great deal of research, theory, and speculation about how and if a president will be successful depending on many aspects of their succession. It leaves a great deal more to be examined however and requires that further investigation into all aspects of the tenure that follows the initial succession event. The transition successes and failures that occur during succession can often be what are most remembered but the entire tenure is what ultimately defines both a leader and an organization.

### **Decision-making Processes**

The process of making strategic decisions is necessary to describe in order to frame this aspect of the study. Decision-making has been researched from an incredible number of perspectives and there are countless theories and assessments of it. There are also numerous types of decisions, including policy decisions, product decisions, process decisions, routine and non-routine decisions, in addition to calculated decisions (Schmidt, 1958). Each decision is “embedded in a rich context of other decisions, outcomes, and experiences” (Ludvig, Madan, and Spetch, 2014, p. 146) and thus takes on a life of its own. There are innumerable models of decision-making such as, upper echelons theory (Hambrick, 1989), cognitive base and values approach and executive characteristics approach (Hambrick and Mason, 1984), functional expertise and knowledge (Zaccaro,

1996), and motivational orientation and personality (Miller, Kets de Vries, & Toulouse, 1982, as cited in Zaccaro, 1996). This study purposefully does not select one particular model or theory to utilize in the research. The narrative approach requires that the focus be on the president and his or her approach to each decision-making process and through data analysis a determination will be made about what changes, if any, have occurred in their decisions over time. To select one model or another would be to force each president into a system they did not utilize when making decisions.

Decision-making has been described as a situational process through which any number of potential decisions exist in a “feasible set” (Vroom and Jago, 2007) that must be sorted en route to each decision. The choices that exist within this set are further defined by the power and politics present both in and out of the university environment (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki, 1992). The reality of each strategic decision is that both politics and power influence the options available as well as the eventual decision that is made by the president. These facts can also influence whether the decision is truly made by the president or is instead made by the Board or other parties within the university environment.

Another aspect of decision-making that must be accounted for is the rarity of complete information to be taken into account with each decision. The possibility that a leader will have a comprehensive view of a situation is atypical and thus many decisions are made based on past experience and the leader’s limited understanding of the situation and its potential solutions (Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Mooney, 2005). The concept of heuristics is raised in much of the decision-making literature as “principles or devices that help limit search in problem-solving situations” (Harrison, 1987, p. 387). Heuristics

help many leaders make decisions quickly with the information that is currently available because “it is better to have an imperfect decision system that reacts swiftly, even by providing suboptimal responses, than to have a decision system that provides the perfect response too late” (Bouyssou, Dubois, Prade, & Pirlot, 2006, p. 490). While heuristic decision-making is flawed and impacted by the “idiosyncratic biases of the decision maker” (Davis and Davis, 2003, p. 65), it is expected that these biases are shaped by the very experiences that led the university to select the president in the first place. The greater challenge is seen when a president’s established biases do not evolve along with the needs of the university and its environment.

While the role of the leader in decision-making processes is sometimes debated, the leader determines “how the problem is to be solved” (Vroom, 1973, p. 66) rather than the specific solution and also determines who should be a part of the solution and the decision. Vroom (1973) provides a number of ground rules and range of choices regarding the decision-making process. These provide guidance which is significantly relevant, especially in light of the model presented by Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991). The table below describes each type:

**Table 2: Decision-Making Choice Matrix**

AI	You solve the problem or make the decision yourself, using information available to you at that time.
AII	You obtain the necessary information from your subordinates, and then decide on the solution to the problem yourself. You may or may not tell your subordinates what the problem is in getting the information from them. The role played by your subordinates in making the decision is clearly one of providing the

	necessary information to you, rather than generating or evaluating alternative solutions.
CI	You share the problem with relevant subordinates individually, getting their ideas and suggestions without bringing them together as a group. Then you make the decision that may or may not reflect your subordinates' influence.
CII	You share the problem with your subordinates as a group, collectively obtaining their ideas and suggestions. Then you make the decision that may or may not reflect your subordinates' influence.
GII	You share a problem with your subordinates as a group. Together you generate and evaluate alternatives and attempt to reach agreement (consensus) on a solution. Your role is much like that of a chairman. You do not try to influence the group to adopt "your" solution and you are willing to accept and implement any solution that has the support of the entire group.

(Vroom, 1973, p. 67)

These different decision styles reflect several dimensions of the seasons of a CEO model including power, information diversity, and commitment to a paradigm.

Leadership of a higher education institution requires critical decisions on a wide range of unique issues. The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges identified the ten areas within which strategic decisions occur at universities in their publication, *Strategic Decision Making* (1987) as:

- Financial affairs;
- enrollment;
- institutional advancement;
- human resources;
- academic activities;
- student affairs;

- intercollegiate athletics;
- physical plant and equipment;
- auxiliary activities;
- and institutional mission.

While these issues are not unique to higher education, the reality of all of them occurring in one organization simultaneously is rare outside of a university setting.

Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) describe the role of an executive as being “first and foremost, careful and comprehensive deciders of major courses of action” (p. 7). Zaccaro (1996) takes this further by identifying the role of the executive as ensuring a fit between the organization and its environment. The need to maintain this fit or “co-alignment” (Bourgeois, 1985, as cited in Zaccaro, 1996, p. 230) is increasingly complicated by a constantly changing and evolving external environment. Every president must balance their power and interest in a situation with a thoughtful approach to each decision they make and this is especially true with strategic decisions. Strategic decisions take on a different set of challenges to include pace, significance of the outcome, and the public nature of the situation, which calls for calculated leadership to cope with the constantly changing environment that exists today (Hagen, Hassan, and Amin, 1998). In the context of higher education, these types of decisions can take on a number of forms and characteristics. Much of these types of details will be omitted from analysis in this study, as the focus will be on how the president approaches each of the decisions. Each president in this study will determine the specific decisions they would like to discuss based on established parameters. Different than decisions in a time of crisis, many decisions can potentially occur without as much immediacy but they can be just as impactful on the university and those it serves.

## **Theories**

The seasons of a CEO's tenure theory provides a starting point for examination of a leader's experience in office and helps us to understand changes that occur over time. The five seasons found in this theory illustrate some standard and easily understood time periods within which to better understand how a leader functions in the ever-changing environment around us. "As the issues facing a business evolve, the CEO must also evolve. At some point, though, evolution isn't enough. The chief executive's talents will no longer be matched to the strategic challenges facing the company" (Freeman, 2004, p. 52). This is an incredibly hard reality for a CEO to identify, accept, and address. The typical response at this point would be for the CEO to "yield to someone with skills better suited to the issues at hand" (Freeman, 2004, p. 52), which is a rare reality. The changes in people, environment, technology, and cultures occur constantly and a president must keep pace, if not stay ahead of these changes to be successful. Examining how a president handles the strategic decisions that occur during these times will provide a better understanding of how they change over time.

### **Leadership**

One of the greatest challenges in studying leaders is the lack of an accepted single definition for the concept. While the focus of this study is on decision-making processes, it is important to outline leadership and the role it plays. This examination of leadership is provided as context only as this study focuses on the leader of a university. Leadership has been conceptualized as the focus of group processes, a personality perspective, act or behavior, a power relationship, a transformational process, or as a set of skills (Northouse, 2007). Northouse (2007) goes on to identify the following four central components of leadership:

- Leadership is a process.
- Leadership involves influence.
- Leadership occurs in a group context.
- Leadership involves goal attainment (p. 3).

Northouse (2007) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). The work of Northouse and the definition of leadership as a process are used in this study because the seasons of a CEO theory is also a process that illustrates changing perspectives and approaches rather than defined skills or traits. Additionally, with a university setting it is important to define leadership in the context of groups, as there are so many different groups affected by and affecting each president (Northouse, 2007, p. 3). The importance of leadership has never been better stated than by Warren Bennis (2007) when he described the “four most important threats facing the world today” as:

1. A nuclear or biological catastrophe;
2. a world-wide epidemic;
3. tribalism and its cruel offspring, assimilation;
4. and the leadership of our human institutions (p. 5).

He goes on to express that leadership is essential in addressing the first three threats and could be the only way to ensure a quality of life for all.

Leadership is an often described and defined concept and there is probably no other subject that has been written about more in the business world. It is a dynamic process that requires leaders to adapt and adjust to each situation and the behaviors of those they lead within an ever-evolving environment (Hersey and Blanchard, 1969). It is

so often studied that leaders themselves will often have their own “mini-theory of leadership” (Jonas, Fry, & Srivastva, 1989, p. 208) to define the qualities and attitudes needed for leadership. The personal nature of leadership is one of its defining characteristics and also the aspect of leadership that makes it so hard to define and grasp universally.

### **Seasons of a CEO’s Tenure**

The concept of seasons within a life cycle has existed for a long time, but Daniel Levinson’s (1978) book *The Seasons of a Man’s Life* brought the concept to the forefront. He considers a season a stable part of the overall cycle with its own time, importance, and need for understanding (p. 7). The character of each season is distinctive while still sharing some commonalities with other seasons (p. 6). This concept of seasons helps to guide the work of Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) as well as the research presented in this study. Even prior to their work, both Oscar Grusky (1963) and Eitzen and Yetman (1972) began to see differences in leaders based on their tenure and overall time of experience in the organization. These each provide a backdrop for the analysis and application of the seasons of a CEO’s tenure (1991) with this research.

Gabarro (1987) notes “new general managers undertook a large immediate wave of changes, predominantly in the functional areas in which they had the most experience. Next, these managers went through a period of more careful diagnosis and fact-finding, or immersion, before launching into another wave of changes that did not bear such a close resemblance to their previous experiences. After the initial influx of actions, an “opening-up” or learning process occurs (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). In their study of NCAA basketball coaches, Eitzen and Yetman (1972) identify change as

occurring quickly with a new leader. One major finding in their study was “for those coaches whose longevity exceeded twelve years, every year but one showed a disproportionate number of coaches ending their career at a school with last-half records poorer than their first” (p. 115). This study illustrated the potential for diminishing levels of success later in a tenure and these results can be applied to other similar leadership roles.

The mystery in leadership and management is how to ensure success, progress, and achievement. There are “many factors, often including elements outside the control of top management” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) that contribute to an organization’s performance. Despite these outside factors, they argue that the “CEO seasons model has significant implications for organizational performance” (p. 732). Overall, they believe that the early part of a CEO’s tenure will lead to an increase in performance that will peak in the fourth season of “convergence.” The authors go on to posit that later in a CEO’s tenure they will “adhere to an obsolete paradigm, rely on a very narrow and highly filtered flow of information, and have diminished task interest” (p. 732). This will lead to diminishing organizational performance as also described by Eitzen and Yetman (1972), whose work describes a graphically represented inverted U performance line over time in office.

The peak in performance described at the convergence stage is intriguing for a number of reasons. First, this is the fourth season and the hope is that there is both a consistent growth of performance toward this season and that this season is enduring. It is necessary to note that this proposition is based only on CEO’s who made it through all five seasons of tenure. Longevity of a president can be identified as having significant

effect on the performance of an organization and there is some variation in when effectiveness may cease (Eitzen and Yetman, 1972). Eitzen and Yetmen (1972) suggested the downturn in performance comes at thirteen years or more, although they do note there is some variation across contexts and particular coaches (p.115). The assumption, based on the work of Grusky (1963), Eitzen and Yetman (1972), and Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991), is that there are benefits to a lengthy tenure, within limits. Understanding the overall approach of the theories at hand provides the context by which further examination of the seasons of a CEO's tenure can be pursued.

### **Dimensions of Change Over Time**

How a president or CEO changes and evolves over time has been considered and studied from a number of perspectives. While Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) examine it from the perspective of a lifecycle, Jonas, Fry, and Srivastva (1989) take a more personal approach. Their research examined the experience from the eyes of the CEO and found that CEOs described their ascension to this role by what is described as “heroic dramas” (p. 206). In this example, the drama has five elements; “the search, the test, the helper, the reward, and the transformation” (p. 206). The search exemplifies the journey of a CEO from mundane and challenging initial roles to the peaks of their profession in ways that seem heroic and remarkable. The test is a number of personal, educational, and/or professional challenges they faced that shaped who they would become as a leader in the future. The helper is when the CEO identified “influential figures who have aided them along their journeys” (Jonas, Fry, & Srivastva, 1989, p. 207) and who stood as role models of the values they wanted to see in themselves. These first three elements lead to “rewards gained through innovation, responsibility,

productivity, recognition, or ethical conduct” (Jonas, Fry, & Srivastva, 1989, p. 207) and take the form of “benefits that accrue to one’s character” (p. 207). All of this leads itself to the final element of transformation where their life and career “departed from a straight-line progression in fundamental ways” (Jonas, Fry, Srivastva, 1989, p. 207) and took a path not originally planned or anticipated. These “life experiences” (p. 207) of a CEO are what shape not only their personal narrative, but also how they describe their life and career to others. This study illustrates the reason why the CEO is so distinct and worth further study into how they evolve, lives, and lead.

Each of the seasons stands out by the manner in which the leader functions and acts and any type of organization can utilize this model including universities and it can be applied to leaders at any level of the organization (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). The five dimensions of commitment to a paradigm, task knowledge, information diversity, task interest, and power (p. 723) shape the five seasons and will be explained in greater detail shortly. As each of these dimensions change, they describe a leader’s journey across the seasons and will be compared to the president’s approach to strategic decisions they have made.

**Commitment to a paradigm.** Every individual has a type of approach or paradigm by which they approach his or her work. Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) highlighted this, stating, “the president acts on the basis of his or her paradigm, or simplifying model of reality” (p. 723). This is often formed over time and is derived from the previous experiences and successes that are the basis for the initial selection of the president for their current role. This paradigm may shift over time as “they may be more open-minded, experimental, and able to learn” at different levels throughout their

time in office (p. 723). This open-mindedness and openness to change may or may not occur, but Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) believe “that executives enter their positions with relatively high commitment to a paradigm, then perhaps enter a period of open-mindedness and experimentation, and finally start the gradual tendency toward recommitment – either of the original paradigm or a revised one” (p. 723).

While the president is new to their current job, they typically would have “held a graduated series of vice presidencies and possibly served as president for a subsidiary or smaller enterprise. In short, such an executive has an established paradigm and, by virtue of being selected as president, is made to feel that that paradigm is potent and correct for the new job, or at least it is better than those of all apparent contenders” (p. 723). This existing paradigm drives initial efforts in what Gabarro (1985) calls the “taking hold” stage, as there is a focus on “corrective” actions, orientation, and evaluation. At this time the new president is bringing their existing paradigm to bear on the issues present in the organization.

Throughout the remainder of his or her tenure, the president can strengthen, adjust, and even abandon their paradigm as they become more acclimated to the organization, the employees and customers, and the environment. It is challenging for a president to abandon their chosen paradigm for a number of reasons, including their overall investment in the approach, the visible nature of everything they do, and the longevity of their tenure, which strengthens their resolve and belief in their paradigm (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991).

As discussed in the contingency theory, every situation is unique and requires a different approach from a leader. Holding steadfast to an initial paradigm creates an

inability to be flexible and address a changing environment. While the initial paradigm may have contributed to the president's hiring, it is rare that the same paradigm would be successful throughout a president's lengthy tenure. All of the previously mentioned reasons for maintaining a paradigm over time lead back to one particular concept that is near and dear to so many leaders — the concept of legacy. This legacy is important to a president and will often be defended very strongly both during and after their tenure and is one of the reasons why commitment to a paradigm is an important dimension in this theory. The longevity of a presidency validates the work that they have done and continues to strengthen the resolve of the president and their supporters in the value and appropriateness of his or her paradigm. While there can be some brief reexamination of this paradigm during the seasons, successful, long-term presidents will often see a gradual and consistent growth in their commitment to their paradigm (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991).

**Task knowledge.** The president enters their role “at a disadvantage in terms of knowledge of the task” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 725). A new president enters the role having a great deal to learn about the new environment and culture before they can effectively manage and lead (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). The focus will be on “grappling with the nature of the new situation, trying to understand the tasks and problems and assessing the organization and its requirements” (Gabarro, 1985, p. 108). Individuals who are experienced presidents from other institutions “may start with less of a deficit than others, but even he or she will be confronted with unfamiliar actors, terms, norms, and so on” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 725). For presidents who have served in the role at a different institution, the task knowledge challenge could potentially

be even more difficult, bringing a greater focus on translation than on new knowledge. Trying to understand a new place within the context of past experience refers back to commitment to a paradigm and instead of seeing a new university for what it is, the president tries to relate it to previous knowledge and experience.

While an internal hire may already have an “established network for information exchange, regarding many dimensions of the job, this person is still in unfamiliar waters” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 725). These internal candidates could overestimate their existing knowledge as well as relationships, which could place significant hurdles before their success. “Task knowledge tapers off after some period in the job” through what is termed an “incremental advance” rather than a decrease or loss of knowledge (p. 725). Gabarro (1987) notes that after about “2.5 years in their jobs”, leaders “tended to engage in more incremental and routine learning than they did in their earlier period on the job” (p. 37). Katz (1980) affirms this in his conclusion that “task knowledge generally reaches a plateau in all job tenures, not only managerial ones” (as cited in Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, 725). As the president looks to overcome the initial expectation of change and gain an impressive grasp of an organization when their knowledge is at its lowest, they eventually find themselves with a great deal of knowledge. How the president examines and interprets that knowledge as well as how well their subordinates give them complete information will play a significant role in how they make decisions.

**Information diversity.** The concept of information diversity refers to how many people the president seeks out for perspective and information and how complete and accurate that information really is. Over time, a president’s sources of information

“become increasingly narrow and restricted” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 725). In regard to the sources of information, it has been found that over time managers seek out fewer and fewer sources. Aguilar (1967) “found that new general managers gathered environmental information in roughly even proportions from external and internal sources; however, as they developed more comfortable and reassuring internal networks, the managers sharply reduced their use of external information sources in favor of internal conduits” (p. 725).

Research has shown that R and D project teams experience a similar connection between tenure and lowered input from external sources (Hambrick & Fukutomi p. 725). Katz (1982) notes:

Given the low levels of external communication for the long-tenured groups, for example, members may have come to believe that they possessed sufficient expertise and knowledge in their specialized technical areas so that it was no longer necessary to pay a great deal of attention to outside sources or new ideas and information (Katz, as referenced in Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991, p.725).

Additionally, the number of internal sources of information diminishes to a few trusted individuals who have learned “how to cater to the CEO’s information preferences” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 726). This leads to a great deal of “filtering and molding” of the information and thus the information provided has been distilled and prepared specifically to paint a certain picture, rather than the full or true picture. One reality in all of this is that at some point in a president’s tenure it becomes impractical to gather and understand every piece of data relevant to a situation and decision (Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Mooney, 2005, p. 478). This will lead to an effort to

interpret each situation through the lens of past experience and can often lead to a reliance on what is comfortable and fits their established paradigm (Hambrick, Finkelstein, & Mooney, 2005, p. 478).

“If the information does not ‘fit’ the CEO’s known acceptance zone, or if it runs counter to his or her increasingly apparent and entrenched paradigm, the CEO is not likely to receive this information from subordinates” (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991, p. 726). So, while the environment continues to change, a CEO is only seeing the picture that is tailor made for use by the CEO and those around him or her. This can lead to any number of issues and concerns that may arise but also has the effect of insulating a CEO from the facts and underlying issues they should be managing day to day. It also further complicates the reality of most situations during which a leader has to act without complete information and a great deal of ambiguity. The fact that their subordinates fail to provide a complete picture coupled with the fact that the president is seeking out less sources of information can hinder the president’s ability to be successful. The trust inherent in these closest advisors is an important part of being a leader. However, as a president’s tenure extends, their interest in the role and the seemingly tedious and routine challenges is only exacerbated by the lack of full information and perspective they are receiving.

**Task interest.** Over his or her time in office, the work of a CEO can go from exciting to routine. Eventually, even those activities that were initially an exciting prospect, or at least a source of anxiety, can become rudimentary and boring. A president’s first presentation to the Board or a meeting of the Faculty Senate can often be an opportunity to share plans and prepare and “the CEO may find these activities

(recurring tasks) stimulating and novel” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). However, “After handling such tasks a few times – and finding that he or she is obligated to keep doing them – the CEO may feel less of a challenge and his or her interest in the position may start to wane” (p. 726). This is a completely normal and understandable reaction to the constant repetition found in many of these activities, similar to someone working on an assembly line every day. “It seems reasonable that, in time, even the most demanding task assignments and responsibilities would be perceived by the incumbent as progressively customary and less interesting and exciting” (Katz, 1980).

While this is a significant area of concern, the result of this boredom or lack of interest is the true reason for anxiety. Presidents don’t necessarily stop liking their jobs, in fact “they may come to feel comfortably ensconced and content with their increasingly familiar activities” (Katz, 1978). These jobs that become routine and even easy are incredibly hard to walk away from for these leaders as typically everything else around them seems to be going incredibly well. “They will tend to become less responsive to task stimuli as routine and habit come to prevail” (Katz, 1980) but the organizations they run will seemingly be at the top of their game and functioning at an incredibly high level. The lack of attention to detail and to the both larger and smaller issues at hand is a type of “dulled acuity, an uncoupling of executive leadership from the organization’s competitive environment” (Hall, 1976; Romanelli & Tushman, 1988). This loss of interest can have ripple effects across all aspects of an organization and brings about the eventual season of dysfunction.

**Power.** Power and decision-making are tied closely together as it is understood that power is “part of the influence process” (Northouse, 2007, p. 7) which plays a central

role in the selected definition of leadership. Power is also one of the five dimensions that define a president's transition through the seasons, as described in the seasons of a CEO theory (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). Power, as defined by French and Raven, has five "common and important bases of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert" (as cited in Northouse, 2007, p. 7). These five power bases are split into two different types: positional and personal (p. 9). The positional power bases are legitimate, reward, and coercive and are grounded in the concept that a leader's position in the organization provides authority or dominance over others without a focus or interest in working together toward a common goal. The personal power bases include referent and expert, and derive from the perception followers have of their leader and how this influences their willingness to follow and be led by that individual. These distinctions are important in the examination of how power changes over time, as a president perhaps relies less on personal power and instead expects employees to follow out of tradition, fear, and coercion.

It has been generally understood that "the power of CEOs increases during their tenures" (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 726) and this increase comes from "a variety of means, all of which are aided by the passage of time" (p. 726). As the presidency is a high-pressure role, the work of Hambrick, Finkelstein, and Mooney (2005) illustrate that "when success occurs for highly pressured executives, they will become extremely confident" (p. 481). This confidence is further bolstered by the media, an elevated public profile, the executive's "own self-attribution of success," and what has come to be called "executive hubris" (p. 481-482). As the president keeps those around who only share the information he or she wants to hear, they also become surrounded by something of a

“personal mystique or patriarchal aura, including unquestioned deference or loyalty, as a lengthening tenure allows the CEO’s power to become institutionalized” (Pfeffer, 1981). The continual success of a president is reinforced because of actual or assumed successes that create “a basis for power” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 726).

Exceptions to the typical power growth trend can come from the type of president selected, the environment of the organization or a number of other factors. Turnaround CEOs are given incredible initial power while a struggling CEO in the middle of their time in office could see reduced power due to greater oversight and a CEO at the end of their tenure can often experience diminishing power and authority (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). Despite these outliers, “the most common pattern is still expected to be an increase in power during the CEO’s tenure” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 727). The power inherent in tenure is hard to deny and can allow a president to stay longer than they should and “in the absence of mandatory retirement policies, each passing year in office brings a greater likelihood of the CEO’s continuing tenure” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 727). By examining power, it becomes clear that walking away from this type of a role is an incredibly challenging decision on many different levels. The opportunity to continue working in a job that has provided great power and validation of a president’s paradigm while having little accountability and few people to listen to would be incredibly hard to voluntarily sacrifice.

**Summary of dimensions.** Over time, these five dimensions have something of a predictable change and pattern that emerges. “Commitment to a paradigm will begin at a relatively high level, decrease briefly during a period of relative open-mindedness, and then increase steadily through the remainder of the tenure. Task knowledge will increase,

at first quickly and then very slowly. Informational diversity will diminish. Task interest will be very high for an initial period, and then it will taper off. The CEO's power generally will increase over time..." (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 727). Through this pattern, power increases and presidents will become harder to remove from their position. These lead us to determine the seasons as described since "these trends, when considered together, as an interrelated set of dynamic flows, suggest discernible seasons or phases in the typical CEO's tenure" (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 727).

Commitment to paradigm may adjust some after experimentation but it gets consistently stronger from there. Task knowledge increases daily as the president experiences more and understands the environment of the university, community, and more every day. Information diversity changes as the president comes to trust and count on fewer and fewer sources of information over their time in office so at the end there are only a small number of select people they really consult on any decisions, if anyone at all. The president would seemingly start off very interested in most of the tasks and areas under their control and probably remain there for the first two seasons but then quickly drop off in seasons 3-5 as more and more items in their role become routine. The power of a president changes as he or she survives the first few years in office and then typically their power would steadily increase due to a number of factors – connections, relationships, appointments to the board, longevity, etc. The table below from Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) illustrates how these dimensions of change evolve over the five seasons of a CEO's tenure.

**Table 3: The Evolution of the Dimensions of Change Over the Seasons of a CEO's Tenure**

<b>Critical CEO Characteristics</b>	<b>1 Response to Mandate</b>	<b>2 Experimentation</b>	<b>3 Selection of an Enduring Theme</b>	<b>4 Convergence</b>	<b>5 Dysfunction</b>
<b>Commitment to a Paradigm</b>	Moderately strong	Could be strong or weak	Moderately strong	Strong; increasing	Very strong
<b>Task Knowledge</b>	Low but rapidly increasing	Moderate; somewhat increasing	High; slightly increasing	High; slightly increasing	High; slightly increasing
<b>Information Diversity</b>	Many sources; unfiltered	Many sources but increasingly filtered	Fewer sources; moderately filtered	Few sources; highly filtered	Very few sources; highly filtered
<b>Task Interest</b>	High	High	Moderately high	Moderately high but diminishing	Moderately low and diminishing
<b>Power</b>	Low; increasing	Moderate; increasing	Moderate; increasing	Strong; increasing	Very strong; increasing

### Seasons

There have been innumerable life cycle models of individuals, organizations, countries, sports teams, etc. that have examined how each of these entities grows and develops over time. These life cycle models have presented anywhere from two to five stages of development and at its most basic, a life cycle has stages of creation or inception, transformation, and decline or maturity (Clark, 1972; Kimberly, Miles, et al, 1980; Quinn and Cameron, 1983; Smith, Mitchell, and Summer, 1985; Greiner, 1997). The concept of a life cycle for organizations came out of the work of Haire (1959), Chandler (1962), and Mooney and Reiley (1931), and the concept continued to evolve

with a great deal of work beginning in the 70s(Smith, Mitchell, and Summer, 1985). Much of the research focused on how leaders changed or evolved throughout each of the stages, or seasons, of their tenure and how the needs of the organizations also changed (Smith, Mitchell, and Summer, 1985, p. 803). The life cycle research identified here was utilized to enlighten and inform the work of this study in examining the specific life cycle of a university president.

John Gabarro's (1987) work in both articles and his book, *The Dynamics of Taking Charge*, focus a great deal on the "taking charge" process. His research and resulting "stages of learning and action" provide greater depth and perspective on the first season of the Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) model. Gabarro's (1987) five stages are "taking hold, immersion, reshaping, consolidation, and refinement" and are found to occur over about a "two and a half to three year time period" (Gabarro, 1987). The empirical nature of his work adds greater insight to the "seasons" theory as well as some understanding of the time period during which both his stages and the "seasons" theory occur. Each of these stages will be further discussed within the explanation of the response to mandate season.

The taking hold stage is described as a time of "orientational and evaluative learning and corrective action," while the immersion stage is a time of "little change but more reflective and penetrating learning" (p. 6-7). The work of Gabarro and Hambrick and Fukutomi are connected in that much of the work of Gabarro informs the first three seasons in Hambrick and Fukutomi's model. The season of "response to mandate" aligns with Gabarro's (1987) first two stages of "taking hold" and "immersion," which last approximately seven to 17 months in total. The season of "experimentation" then aligns

with Gabarro's "reshaping" stage and lasts approximately three to six months. The season of "selection of an enduring theme" has a number of similarities to the "refinement" stage in Gabarro's work. While there are a number of life cycle models, the combination of these two was purposeful as they reinforce each other and provide a richer description of the first half of the CEO's time in office.

**Response to mandate.** The concept of "response to mandate" as one of the seasons of a CEO's tenure is not surprising or complex. It can be generally assumed that a university has determined a direction or path for itself upon hiring a new president, or at a minimum it is known whether the new president should continue on the current path or strike out in a new direction. Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) note that there are really two basic initial mandates, "continuity (no change) or one of dramatic change (cut costs, innovate, expand globally, etc.)" (p. 727). There can and should be a significant amount of nuance beyond these basic mandates, but nevertheless, continuing on a current path or finding a new direction are often the broad mandates provided.

The way this season manifests itself is that the president "generally devotes attention and energies to responding to the mandate he or she has been given by the board or predecessor president" (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 727). This is often "more implicit than explicit, and is a message to the new president concerning the magnitude, direction, and pace of change that is expected" (Vancil, 1987 as cited in Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 727). Gabarro (1987) writes, "early on, the president's actions are very much a reflection of this going-in mandate" (as cited in Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991 p. 728). It has also been noted that presidents "enter the office on day one with at least two theories guiding his or her behavior: a theory of role (What am I supposed to

do?) and a theory of effectiveness (How will I judge my performance?)” (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, Bogue, 2013, p. 16). There is a focus on a leader’s legacy and the concept of legacy drives a number of the seasons and should not be ignored as a driving factor in decision-making as well.

The aforementioned two basic types of mandates, continuity or change, lead to an automatic assumption of either exploration or exploitation from the very beginning of the president’s tenure. In personal communication with President Emeritus Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, he noted that this initial season can blur with the second season for a president who is external to the university. He noted that the “time of experimentation happens quicker” (personal communication, Oct. 22, 2012) as the mandate for an external president is often to experiment and innovate immediately. He believes there is an “openness and appetite for change when a president is brought in externally to the university” (Trachtenberg, personal communication, Oct. 22, 2012).

This is further reinforced by the work of Helmich and Brown (1972) and their predecessors. They believe that external successors will not only enter with a greater mandate for change, but will also have the ability to make change that an internal successor could not accomplish (Carlson, 1962; Grusky, 1960 as cited in Helmich & Brown, 1972). The external successor is also more likely to “strategically replace subordinates” (p. 371) in his or her top management team in order to remove those that aren’t in line with new policies, add those that will be supportive, and remove those that are not up to par. This creates a “new informal social circle, which revolves about the president and supports his or her own status and policies” (p. 371). There is often a tendency by external successors to create more positions in the management team than

would an internal successor. This would also lead to greater change and experimentation as fewer members of the team would have history and context of the organization and would be more likely to try new ideas and concepts with little thought to what had happened previously.

There are a number of characteristics of this season that are consistent whether presidents are internal or external. The first is that the president is “working to develop an early track record, legitimacy, and political foothold” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) and focusing on the provided mandate. In this way, the president tries to understand the environment around them and determine how the skills, knowledge, and abilities they bring to the position can best be utilized to meet, or hopefully exceed, what is expected of them. The mandate and the “competencies that earned the person the job” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 728) should match up as it is assumed the university would select someone to fit their most immediate needs. The president that remains at the institution then, presumably, takes the opportunity to examine the next stage of their time in office and entertain new ways of approaching their work.

**Experimentation.** A period of experimentation will often follow the initial response to mandate. This is a time when the president has “achieved some early successes, gained a political foothold” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 728) and otherwise established themselves in the position. It is important to note that some presidents skip this season if they are “convinced of the enduring correctness of their initial paradigm and comfortable pursuing it indefinitely” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 728). Many presidents are selected because it is believed that their paradigm is correct for the challenges or opportunities facing an institution so there can be a resistance to

experiment, but “if open-mindedness and experimentation is ever to occur during a CEO’s tenure, it will be most likely at this point” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 728). It has been identified by Helmich (as cited in Kesner & Sebor, 1994) that “despite the presence of consistent patterns immediately following succession, new leaders frequently changed styles two years after taking office. Task oriented leaders became more employee centered and employee centered leaders became more task oriented” (p. 341). As noted previously, President Stephen Joel Trachtenberg (personal communication, Oct. 22, 2012) believes external presidents are typically expected to innovate and experiment as part of their mandate so the first two seasons might be one in the same for some presidents.

Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) describe this period as a time when presidents “may relax their commitment to their paradigms, attempt new approaches to running their enterprises, and generally try more broadly gauged methods than they were willing to attempt in the initial days of their tenures” (p. 728).

This season has been the least studied and defined in literature (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) and much of the support for it comes from the work of Gabarro (1987). Gabarro found that “after an initial wave of actions that matched their going-in mandates and personal credentials, managers entered a brief period of intense learning with few changes, followed by another large wave of changes that bore less correspondence to their going-in mandates or prior backgrounds” (as cited in Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 728). While there has not been significant research on the experimentation season, “a logical case can be made for it by examining a number of critical trends” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730). The response to mandate season is not just a time of doing

what is asked of a CEO, but it is also a time of significant learning. The CEO is utilizing a “diverse set of information sources and still has a high level of task interest” but has not had “the political leeway or inclination to deviate widely from what he or she was brought in to do” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730). The early successes and knowledge acquisition provides the CEO with a greater willingness and authority to “consider new directions” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730) for the organization and take some risks that may not have felt possible or appropriate earlier in their tenure. In a somewhat fluid manner during the response to mandate season, a president will slowly either validate or discard old ways in exchange for what they have learned through the experimentation season.

**Selection of an enduring theme.** In the selection of an enduring theme season, the president identifies a theme or direction for the organization that will follow through the remainder of their time in office (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). Later seasons seek to support and further strengthen this identified theme rather than changing or altering any of its key elements. This period is described as a time when the “CEO reflects probably more subconsciously than consciously, on everything he or she has tried during the first two stages of the tenure” and then “selects those elements that seem to work the best and that are the most comfortable” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730). It is important to note the distinction between effectiveness and comfort. The selected theme is chosen not only because it is the best approach but because it is also comfortable for the executive. One of the key questions and defining moments in the career of an executive is when these two pieces are incongruent. This could be a defining moment for a president’s tenure and would be an area for additional research, as there are a number of

studies that have been done and Danny Miller's work in "Stale in the Saddle" (1991) directly addresses the choice made at this juncture in a presidency.

The choice made at this point is a time when a president might "recrystallize their paradigm" and a conclusion that "their initial paradigms, which they applied in the response to mandate phase, are the ones best suited for their firms and them" (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730). In addition, those executives that never enter into an experimentation season automatically come to this season from the beginning of their tenure (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730). Another possibility at this stage is that a president might identify their approach during the experimentation season as more appropriate for the future of the organization (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730). Finally, the president may have learned new and valuable things through the previous two seasons and will now adjust their initial paradigm based on these new areas of learning and insight. The result is a new paradigm and approach based on a combination of both previous experiences and the knowledge gained in their current organization. This adjusted paradigm is likely the most realistic expectation of what would occur at this point in a president's tenure (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). As this season follows the one and only time a president may truly examine their approach, this season can set the tone for the remainder of the presidency. While the next season really just builds upon what is accomplished in this one, the final season is when progress, innovation, and experimentation tend to slow or fade entirely.

**Convergence.** After the selection of a theme, the president will "reinforce and bolster it through a stream of relatively incremental actions" (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730) over the remaining time in this season. Many of these changes will "relate

to structure, staffing, processes, or functional area initiatives” but the overall goal and focus of any change at this point is to “support and converge on the CEO’s theme” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730). The concept of convergence is taken from Tushman and Romanelli’s (1985) work covering both “reorientations” during major change and “convergence” during “periods of incremental change” (as cited in Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730). They also identify that reorientations most often “coincide with CEO succession, whereas convergence occurs in the subsequent years of a CEO’s tenure” (as cited in Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 730).

Convergence can be a time of momentum for a president as they build from the success in previous seasons and carry that success into the later years of their tenure. The concept of momentum was raised by Miller and Friesen (1984) and is explained by noting that an “organizational attribute is three times as likely to be followed by further change in the same direction as by reversal in direction” (as cited in Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991, p. 731). Momentum is considered to be a “nearly universal phenomenon among longer tenure CEOs” and the aforementioned reversals occur almost exclusively at times during which there is a new CEO (p. 731). The refinement stage, as explained by Gabarro (1987), further refines the season of convergence in which he identifies that “almost all actions taken occur in the first two and a half years in office” (p. 15). This is followed by a period defined as refinement where “only a few changes are made and those changes were made to fine-tune the organization” (p. 15).

Examining the characteristics of a CEO defined previously helps to explain this season in its entirety. As illustrated in Table 2, both the commitment to a paradigm and power characteristics are strong and still growing while both the task interest and

diversity of information have diminished greatly. Combining these trends with a task knowledge that has reached a plateau creates an opportunity for reaching extremes of all five characteristics. This then sets into motion the eventual transition into the final season of “dysfunction,” as a firmly entrenched theme will hurt a president’s ability to adjust to an ever-changing environment both in and outside the organization.

**Dysfunction.** The dysfunction season, as is true for most of the seasons, lacks a discernible starting point. As a president continues in his or her role, “the positive effects of his or her continuing tenure are outweighed by the negative effects” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 731) of the organization’s lack of awareness and adjustment to the surrounding and internal environment. There will be less interest and focus on “substantive initiatives, even those that would reinforce the now long-enduring theme” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 731), their overall approach to decisions and actions becomes more lethargic, and they receive only “highly distilled information” from those around them (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 731). At this point in their tenure, presidents also tend to seek out more external opportunities to engage with as they become “less involved in acts of substance” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 731) on campus and focused on the university. This breeds a number of problems, but most importantly it leads to an organization struggling to adapt to the environment around it.

Becoming “Stale in the Saddle” as is posited by Danny Miller (1991), is the ultimate expression of the conclusion of the convergence season as well as the season of dysfunction. He states, “long CEO track records increase resistance to reorientation and erode the match between organization and environment” (Miller, 1991, p. 35). Miller (1991) also notes that long-term CEOs can often resist and delay these external pressures

through the relationships they have built and the team they have created around them, as these individuals are typically in line with the president's own way of thinking. CEOs can "become technically obsolete... as their cognitive schemas are tied to skills and patterns of behavior that led to success in the past but that are obstacles to understanding current environmental conditions" (Ocasio, 1994, p. 288). They can also become politically obsolete with "an increasing inability to control political conflict and maintain stable political coalitions" (Ocasio, 1994, p. 288). The question that must be asked at this point is why many presidents remain in office so long after entering a season of dysfunction? There can be many answers to this question but one potential answer is that because of their time in office, power, and experience, they are often able to "save" the university in a time of trouble.

Ocasio (1994) found that the "power of the CEO will become most evident under conditions of economic adversity, as more powerful CEOs will be able to use their sources of power to maintain their authority and positions within the corporation" (p. 287). A president that can see its university through such a challenging time simply reinforces their position and power and becomes even less likely to retire or transition out of the role. A situation such as this can make it more difficult for those that see the need for new leadership to gain support for some time after the successful management of a crisis as noted above. The combination of the president's growing power and a lack of properly positioned dissenters allow the organization to ignore and even neglect the obvious signs of change in the environment and the university's inability to manage and adapt to the changes.

Steve Jobs is often used as an example of a true entrepreneurial leader in many management and leadership publications. In examining his first tenure at Apple, observers see someone who “relied primarily on his personal charisma and entrepreneurial reputation as a basis for controlling Apple’s board and the corporation” (Ocasio, 1994, p. 288). He failed to “build personal alliances with board members and senior managers” (Ocasio, 1994, p. 288) and he was eventually supplanted by John Sculley and removed. While he was the perfect fit in an entrepreneurial organization, long-term success eluded him during his first tenure because he did not adjust to the needs of the organization and the environment external to Apple. We see this coming full circle when Jobs was asked to come back to the company later in his life to save it, as Apple had lost its essential entrepreneurial spirit along with his departure.

One question that lingers is who is responsible for the season of dysfunction? While many of the other stages seem to fall squarely on the shoulders of the incumbent president, the season of dysfunction seems to require a number of willing accomplices; from the boardroom to the top management team.

One particular example of this was provided during a conversation with the George Washington University President Emeritus Stephen Joel Trachtenberg. Under the premise that in the dysfunction season the president stops trying to innovate and try new things, Trachtenberg argued that even when the president may want to move forward, those around him may be unwilling. When asked, “Who is responsible for the dysfunction and what is its source,” he provided a fitting example that broadened the potential sources of such dysfunction.

Trachtenberg stated that he was “still pushing to the last, but everyone around him wouldn’t” (personal communication, Oct. 22, 2012). He used an example of a townhouse purchase for \$5M that he thought was an important strategic piece of land but no one (the board, vice president, or treasurer) wanted to make that type and size of a decision in his last half-year. He stated, “even if the president wants to try new and exploratory things – those around him won’t.” In this instance, he saw an opportunity but as he was in the last few months of his time in office, there was less of an interest in continuing to make large-scale financial decisions so close to a new president coming into office. In many ways, this can be understood from the perspective of those staying behind after a president retires. Those staff members and board members need to work with the new president and making such a large decision that the new president will have to live with is a dangerous proposition if the new president disagrees with the choice that was made.

The work of William Ocasio focuses on the concept of obsolescence, which is linked to Hambrick and Fukutomi’s (1991) season of dysfunction. While a great deal of obsolescence and dysfunction can occur naturally over time, Ocasio believes that both “obsolescence and contestation” occur as CEOs “are challenged by both internal political processes and external environmental contingencies” (Ocasio, 1994, p. 285). Individuals in the role of president are predisposed to have a higher level of ego than most other people by the nature of the position and role. This “ego problem” can rear its head late in a tenure when a president should step aside but stubbornly fails to surrender the prestige and power associated with the position (Freeman, 2004). There can also be a hope that

their successor might stumble, “thereby making their own achievements look better in retrospect” (Freeman, 2004, p. 52).

While all five dimensions described by Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) are relevant throughout the president’s tenure, power has a significant part to play in the final season. Over time, there is a significant commitment to a president and the direction they have laid out for the organization and their power grows as the need to stay the course is reinforced (Ocasio, 1994, p. 286). The president’s “beliefs and practices become institutionalized and the incumbent’s actions become taken for granted and his or her power are no longer questioned” (Ocasio, 1994, p. 287). Finally, a long-tenured president will seek to reinforce their position and insulate themselves from scrutiny by “making appointments and establishing networks of influence in ways that consolidate and perpetuate their power” (Ocasio, 1994, p. 287). In this way, we may find presidents more focused on keeping their jobs than doing their jobs. In many ways this can be understandable if we analyze the position they have grown into in the university.

In 2005 the average presidential tenure was 5.2 years suggesting that the likelihood of a president having a long tenure in office (more than 10 years) is becoming exceedingly rare. A president that “survives” beyond this time period would have every reason to feel emboldened and seek to hold power as long as possible. By examining the five dimensions of change it is clear how they each evolve over time. It makes a great deal of sense that a president would want to maintain a position with growing or stable power, very few surprises, and a great deal of established knowledge, relationships, and networks to make the job less challenging on a regular basis. This is the inherent challenge of the stage of dysfunction. The position is no longer challenging, or at times

interesting, and yet what comes along with the position is almost impossible to give up. As Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) state, “job mastery gives way to boredom; exhilaration to fatigue; strategizing to habituation” (PAGE NUMBER). They go on to say that “executives may show few signs of this malaise” to the public at large but “inwardly the spark is dim; openness and responsiveness to stimuli are diminished” (p. 731).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Overview of Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the decision-making processes across the lifecycle of a university president and more specifically, how their approach to decision-making changes throughout their tenure. The study focused on these unique leaders and how their approach to strategic decisions changed over time. The seasons of a CEOs tenure model (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991) offers an explanation of the dynamics this change and provides the theoretical framework for this study of how decision-making among university presidents evolves over time. This chapter outlines the methodology for the study, presenting the paradigm of inquiry, research question, research design, sampling strategy, research procedures for data collection and analysis, methods of verification (trustworthiness), and ethical and human considerations.

### **Research Questions**

Understanding the presidential experience is critical to examining how universities function. Over time, the university environment changes and the hope is that leaders change along with the environment or, preferably, ahead of it. As stated in the purpose for this study, the goal is to explore university presidents' decision-making processes over time as conceptualized by Hambrick and Fukutomi's (1991) seasons of tenure. In order for the interviewed presidents to focus on their experience retrospectively, the research question had to provide moments in time to help presidents reflect. As Van de Ven (2007) notes, "the research question should directly address a critical aspect of the problem as it was observed in reality" (p. 88). As the problem

statement for this study lays out: Gaining an understanding of the decision-making processes of a university president throughout their tenure is an essential step in helping universities thrive within the changing environment around them. This problem statement leads to the following overarching research question: How do university presidents' decision-making processes change during the "seasons" of their tenure (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991) in office?

### **Research Procedures**

The epistemological position taken in this study is constructionism (Crotty, 1998). Researchers utilizing this epistemology "delve into the depths of human consciousness and subjectivity in their quest for the fundamental meanings which underlie social life" (Crotty, 1998, p. 31). This epistemology aligns with this inquiry because of its focus on the social constructions of university presidents regarding their decision-making processes during their presidencies. While a post-positivistic study would provide greater opportunity to generalize the findings, the focus and interest is in gaining a deep understanding of this phenomenon. Additionally, as noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) a "generalization must be truly universal, unrestricted as to time and space. It must formulate what is always and everywhere the case" (p. 297). This seems to be an incredibly challenging goal to meet in the ever-changing and diverse world of higher education institutions and further reinforced the rationale for a qualitative approach to this study.

Merriam (2009) suggests that "there is no single, observable reality" and there can be "multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event". So, while many presidents may face the "same" strategic choice, they will each experience it differently

and within different environmental circumstances. This leads to the discussion of constructionism and the rejection of the concept that there is an “objective truth waiting for us to discover it” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

This research is focused on “understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009). This basic qualitative study is emblematic of constructionism. Merriam (2009) describes the three areas of interest in qualitative study as:

1. How people interpret their experiences
2. How they construct their worlds
3. What meaning they attribute to their experiences (p. 13-14)

This qualitative inquiry is focused on all three areas in examining university presidents’ perceptions regarding decision-making processes during their presidencies. The study is guided by Merriam’s (2009) “basic qualitative” methodology and the constructionist epistemology.

Within the broad approach of qualitative inquiry, this study will utilize narrative inquiry and analysis to gather the stories of each subject and ascertain how each president has made sense of their experiences (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Merriam (2009) describes narrative analysis as a way to study an individual’s experience through their stories, as this is the way they “make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us” (p. 32 and 202). Neisser and Fivush (1994, as cited in Webster and Mertova, 2007) explain the value of story and narrative inquiry when they state:

Particular events become important parts of our life because they provide some meaningful information about who we are, and the narrative forms for representing and recounting these events provide a particular structure for understanding and conveying this meaning (p. 4).

Stories are holistic and powerful and how an individual shares a story in regard to language, expression, and their “voice” (Van De Ven, 2007, p. 224) can be just as important as the words used to tell the story itself (Merriam, 2009; Van De Ven, 2007; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Webster and Mertova, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly were the first to use narrative inquiry to expand a growing field of study that focused initially on storytelling by schoolteachers (Webster and Mertova, 2007). The interview-based methodology does have limitations in regard to a lack of additional data sources for corroboration and its focus on retrospective perceptions about one moment in time. While participants will be examining their experience over time, this is not considered a full longitudinal study but rather a series of episodes in the experience of the president. Narrative inquiry is justified for use in this study for its reliability in capturing the full richness of a complete story like that of a full president’s tenure.

Concepts arise through an inductive process of gathering data and works from the “particular to the general” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15-16). Additionally, the design characteristics are “flexible, evolving, and emergent” (Merriam, 2009, p. 18) to allow for greater data collection and shifting direction if needed based on the data provided by the participants. Interviews will be sole method for gathering data for this study since the focus of this inquiry is on the presidents’ perspectives regarding their decision-making over time.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis is the “entity (individuals, collectives, or objects) being studied” (Van de Ven, 2007) and in this study it will be the individual, and more specifically, the university president. The presidents for this study are specifically chosen due to a number of criteria and, unlike many other studies, it is easy to determine the president of a university as the unit of analysis and thus identify the subjects. While there may be other positions in a university setting that could also support the study and illuminate the seasons of a CEO’s tenure (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) theory, the focus remains on presidents most specifically because of their similarity to CEOs.

### **Sampling Strategy and Recruitment**

There are more than 2700 four-year higher education institutions in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). As this study focuses on presidents, this would provide a minimum sample of 2700 individuals. In addition, focusing on retired presidents could increase that number to an unmanageable level. The strategy to reach the number of presidents needed for the study will be purposeful sampling and specifically, criteria sampling (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Based on the criteria for these subjects, a number of resources will be utilized to gather the 8-12 president sample. Presidents known to the researcher and recommendations by the committee will first be utilized, in addition to those identified from research done on presidential retirements over the last five years. If needed, snowball sampling will be utilized to get to the sample size necessary. Creswell (2007) describes the snowball sampling technique as identifying cases by using those who are already “information-

rich” to find others like them. This approach will provide a large enough sample to gain an understanding about decision-making processes in the university presidency.

### **Criteria**

The retrospective focus of this study requires that all presidents be retired at the time of their interview. This will allow them to be able to reflect upon their entire tenure in office without biases created by challenges inherent in a current presidential role. Also, as progress through the seasons of tenure can take a number of years to complete, only presidents whose last presidency was at least 10 years in length will be interviewed. Although these two specifications will limit the available pool of presidents, it will provide a higher quality sample from which to gather data and gain a better understanding of their experiences.

In an effort to further refine the inquiry, the potential subjects will be limited to those that served at what the Carnegie Foundation terms “doctorate-granting institutions” or “Master’s Colleges and Universities.” These classifications are designed to help researchers “identify groups of roughly comparable institutions” (<http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org>). Narrowing the inquiry to these two types of universities still encompasses a large number of institutions and provides a valuable grouping of comparable institutions. Additionally, selecting these two categories removes a number of institution types, including special focus institutions, tribal colleges, and associates colleges. This provides greater similarities among the presidents’ experiences and decisions and allows for better comparison of all subjects. This is equally important because the goal is not maximum variation but rather saturation or redundancy in this particular area of focus.

## Sample Size

In defining the target population and size, the strategy for identifying the purposeful sample is equally as important as the actual size of the sample. In fact, McCracken (1988) states that the selection of the individuals who will provide rich information is of greater importance than the actual sample size. Merriam (1998) notes that there is no one answer to the question about sample size since it depends on many aspects of a study, including the goal. Patton (2002) goes on to say that the focus should be on “information-rich cases, from which one can learn a great deal about matters of importance and therefore worthy of in-depth study” (p. 242). The sample size needed is what is necessary to answer the question asked and that can vary based on a number of factors. Patton (2002) recommends a minimum sample size “based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study” (p. 246) and Creswell (2007) provides broad guidance that the sample size should be sufficient enough to “elucidate the particular, the specific” (p. 126), not to generalize.

In examining the many perspectives about sample size and the desire to reach a data saturation or redundancy point, a range of 8-10 subjects was reached. As qualitative inquiry is reliant on “purposeful strategies instead of methodological rules” (Patton, 2002, p. 242), this study utilized purposeful sampling to reach this conclusion. In a review of 560 qualitative studies, Mason (2010) found that the sample sizes most frequently utilized were (in order) 20 and 30 (tied), 40, and 10 and 25 (tied). The criteria selected for this purposeful sample will potentially not allow for these larger sample sizes and the evidence of many other studies utilizing a similar sample size validates this determination. Seeking out variation, the inclusion of extreme cases, or even typical

cases, were possible approaches to determining a sample. However, selecting a particular set of criteria met the research goals of this study more closely than the inclusion of extreme cases. The selected subjects were chosen “because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 78) that are the focus of this inquiry.

While there are almost three thousand institutions of higher education in America, narrowing this to only certain types of institutions and subjects to retired or retiring presidents whose last presidency was at least ten years defines and delimits the sample. In addition, the narrative inquiry focus of the interview process will provide information-rich cases that allow for a smaller sample size. It is also essential to be realistic regarding the limitations in locating and interviewing a larger number of presidents that meet the established criteria. By establishing the minimum at eight, a larger number of potential subjects can be identified to allow for those that choose not to participate while still allowing the study to reach the minimum. This also provides flexibility should it be determined that additional subjects could provide greater insight into the questions posed. This number allows the study to “answer the question posed at the beginning of the study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 80). Furthermore, this sample size is sufficient to provide an appropriate level of understanding of the phenomena and reach both saturation and redundancy.

### **Data Collection**

In an effort to develop the best possible data collection, these processes and procedures were guided by the work of both Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2007). This section will describe and outline the interview logistics, protocol, pilot, recording, notes,

and transcription.

### **Logistics**

The initial 8-10 subjects were identified through a number of sources, including the researcher's own personal experience and relationships as well as recommendations from the committee. All interviews will be conducted via phone on a recorded conference line to achieve greater consistency. Prior to the interviews, subjects will be sent several pieces of information. First, they will receive an invitation to participate and a brief overview of the study in order to familiarize themselves with the context of the interview (Appendix A). This will also include an overview of the interview and a prompt to consider four strategic moments during their last presidential tenure. They will be told to identify moments from the first year, the early period, late period, and final year of their last presidential tenure. The researcher will be responsible for all aspects of the interviews.

As many of the presidents in this study have extensive tenures it was important to narrow the focus of the time frame of the study to a particular set of incidents. Moments of strategic choice tend to stand out for presidents due to their public nature and number of people affected by each decision they make. These incidents provide a great deal of insight into the five factors found in the "Seasons of a CEO's Tenure" article (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) that presents the foundational theory for this study. Decision-making processes provide the right focus for identifying this moment in time that will help paint a picture of university presidents in a unique and telling way.

### **Interview Protocol**

Each interview will last approximately one hour and will focus on the strategic

moments identified by each subject. Following a brief collection of biographical and demographic information, each president will be asked to briefly describe what brought them to the presidency and what allowed them to remain in the role for ten years or more. They will also be asked for their philosophy and approach to decision-making before utilizing a semi-structured format with open-ended questions to get a rich description of each of the decisions they have selected. The discussion about each strategic decision will last approximately 10 minutes and after the subject is asked to provide a brief level of context, will include a focus on the five characteristics defining of a CEO's tenure:

- Commitment to a paradigm;
- task knowledge;
- information diversity;
- task interest;
- power (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991).

The discussion about each strategic decision will provide a foundational understanding of how the preceding characteristics change over time and how the “seasons” change in a presidency. The semi-structured nature of the interview allows for flexibility with the questions utilized while still getting specific data from each subject (Merriam, 2009). This more flexible approach allows for the individual nature of a person's experience to come out in their narrative and will allow for a more natural discussion in the interview.

The interview protocol is adapted from the one used in *The Lessons of Experience* (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988) in which the authors studied how senior executives developed on the job. They were each asked to consider “certain events or episodes that led to a lasting change in their approach to management” (p. 198) and had a series of questions about each event that were adapted to learn more about their

strategic decisions. In this study, the presidents will also be asked to identify different types of strategic decisions so as to hone in only one type of issue such as fiduciary or human resources. The full interview protocol can be found in Appendix E.

### **Recordings, Notes, and Transcription**

The interviews will be audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. In addition to an audio recording, notes will be taken throughout in order to identify key areas for follow up during the interview. This also provides an opportunity to record items that stand out but will not be present in a transcription like pauses or the interviewer's reaction to certain statements (Creswell, 2007, p. 109). This combines two of the methods recommended by Merriam (2009) and, by using a protocol described by Creswell (2007), will provide a distinct format and structure to each interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Once all data has been collected and transcribed, the process of coding in order to determine the value, importance, and credibility of the data will take place. This will be done through what Merriam (2009) describes as both “inductive and comparative” processes in order to “make sense out of the data” (p. 175). This is the essence of constructionism as meaning will be made from the narratives collected through the process. This free flow from data to theory and potential concepts will be ongoing from the first interview. Each interview will give new insights into future interviews and the data analysis and comparison of data from each interview will be part of the process.

The work of Merriam (2009) has been helpful in shaping the approach to data analysis but the six-step process for data analysis from Creswell (2009) will be used to structure the process. This process is as follows:

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis.
2. Read through all of the data.
3. Begin detailed analysis with a coding process.
4. Use the coding process to generate a description.
5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.
6. Make an interpretation of the data.

### **Validity/Trustworthiness**

To establish trustworthiness in the findings, two different techniques will be utilized. Maxwell (2005) describes validity as a means to ensure the credibility of a study and it is evaluated by the purpose and circumstances of the study. The inherent challenge of validity or trustworthiness is that the “chief instrument is the inquirer him – or herself” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 293) which makes objectivity “dissolve” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 219). Research has shown that when CEOs are sharing their stories they often report greater “purpose and intelligibility” (Jonas, Fry, & Srivastava, 1989) in their handling of issues than was true in the actual moment. There is often a set of concerns when interviewing elites that there is no objective truth present and that some respondents will be dishonest in their responses (Morris, 2009). In fact, Berry (2002) goes so far as to remind us that “interviewers must always keep in mind that it is not the obligation of a subject to be objective and to tell us the truth” (p. 680). Additionally, their stories often take on a “heroic drama” (Jonas, Fry, & Srivastava, 1989, p. 206) quality that can tend to cloud the facts surrounding a situation or incident. There are five elements of the “drama of chief executive as hero” including the search, the test, the

helper, the reward, and the transformation (Jonas, Fry, & Srivastava, 1989, p. 206). Each of these elements has its own unique traits and questions in this study will be shaped to steer away from the often-used clichés found in each of them.

The first technique to establish trustworthiness will be member checking. The member check will involve sending the full transcripts back to each participant for their review prior to developing themes. The value of the member check is that it gets to the intention of the participant, puts them on record as both saying certain things and agreeing they said them, and provides opportunities to summarize with the participant (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This method is the “single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). This will take some time and present challenges in order to get this validation from the large number of interviewees.

The second technique to establish trustworthiness will be the ethical approaches to the study. Stake (as cited in Merriam, 2009) states, “qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (p. 231). This involves “intellectual rigor, professional integrity, and methodological competence” in all aspects of the study including data collection, analysis, and reporting (Merriam, 2009, p. 229-230). In addition, as many retired presidents write their own memoirs and can at times see themselves retrospectively in the best light, responses must be taken at face value and the perspectives shared must be respected as honest and forthright.

Many presidents have written their own memoirs to describe their experience throughout their careers and many others have been interviewed by a number of authors and researchers. The prevalence of these publications presents the opportunity to verify information gained through study interviews against external sources to gain a clear and equitable illustration of the presidential experience. Finally, in understanding the researcher's bias as an individual employed in the field of higher education, personal preconceptions and beliefs must be set aside as much as possible in providing the most accurate description of what is actually being shared by the participants. While it will not be possible to remove all of biases, through consistent coding and other methods of verification mentioned previously, bias should be limited and trustworthiness can be ensured in this study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

This chapter presents the findings of this qualitative research study focused on answering the research question: How do university presidents' decision-making processes change during the "seasons" of their tenure (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991) in office? The data from 12 semi-structured individual interviews with retired university presidents was analyzed to identify findings related to the research question. The chapter will include an overview of the sample of presidents utilized for this research as well as an explanation and description of the codes and themes derived from analysis of the interviews. There were eight major themes identified in the analysis: (a) presidencies often last too long and presidents are no longer the right person for their institution; (b) presidents need principles for decision-making that adapt over time; (c) presidents have a responsibility to make decisions and gather advice and input in the process; (d) presidents did not change their approach but their confidence and the community's relationship with them did change; (e) managing crisis requires swift action and integrity; (f) presidencies should start with setting goals and building relationships; (g) personnel decisions require a deft touch and courage; (h) there is a value to getting advice and perspective from outside the institution.

Interview transcripts were sent to each participant for their review and approval prior to the coding process. The resulting twelve transcripts were analyzed to develop a series of codes and themes that will be presented later in this chapter and utilized to present a series of interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations in chapter five. One transcript was altered significantly by the participant, but as the member check was a

defined aspect of the process, the edits were accepted and utilized for analysis and coding. All transcripts provided significant content and insight into the research question and were utilized extensively in the identification of both codes and themes for the findings section of the dissertation.

### **Overview of the Sample**

The twelve retired presidents selected for this study represent a range of institution types and backgrounds and brought different experiences and histories to the interviews. Potential presidents for this study were identified through research on presidential retirements in the past five to ten years, personal connections to presidents, and recommendations from members of the dissertation committee and colleagues. A number of presidents were contacted without any prior connection to the researcher and none of those presidents responded or agreed to participate in this study. A snowball sampling technique was utilized by which each participant was asked to identify other presidents that met the study criteria and assist the researcher in making contact with the potential participant. This process led to a high response rate from potential participants who stated that their reason for participating was due to the request from a fellow university president. All twelve participants were the result of relationships to the researcher, committee members, or snowball sampling via other participants in the study.

The criteria for the sample were as follows: retired presidents, last presidential tenure of at least ten years, and representing universities the Carnegie Foundation terms “doctorate-granting institutions” or “Master’s Colleges and Universities.” The researcher had developed a list of potential participants and many from this initial list did not respond to requests for participation. Despite this reality, the resulting participants

provided a demographically and institutionally diverse sample that represents university presidents and their decision-making processes. The retrospective nature of the criteria allowed the participants to more freely discuss their experiences without the ongoing distraction of the presidency or the pressure of day-to-day decision-making in the role. The length of tenure criteria provides for a better opportunity for presidents to have gone through the seasons of tenure that is the theoretical basis for this study. One participant did not meet the tenure criteria for this study but remained as a part of the sample because of the type of institution represented, the diversity of the candidate, and the value and depth the candidate's responses added to the study.

Participants were promised anonymity for this study so pseudonyms were provided for them and their institutions will be referred to broadly throughout the remainder of the dissertation. Additionally, specific details about decisions and individuals have been generalized or changed in order to protect their anonymity. Broad descriptions will be provided for each participant in Table 3:

**Table 4: Presidential Demographics**

<b>President</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Length of last presidency</b>
Scott Baker	Male	BA, PhD	17 years
Steven Gibson	Male	BS, MBA, DBA	16 years
Margaret Jackson	Female	BA, MA, MA, PhD	13 years
Stanley Johnson	Male	BA, MS, PhD	16 years
David Jones	Male	BS, Med, PhD	14 years
Jeffrey McDaniel	Male	BA, MA, PhD	19 years
Ian Morris	Male	BA, MBA, JD	10 years
Howard Phillips	Male	BA, MS, PhD	14 years
Peter Reed	Male	BA, MA, PhD	10 years

William Stephens	Male	BA, PhD	15 years
Frederick Simmons	Male	BA, MA, PhD	19 years
Gloria Taylor	Female	BA, MPH, MA,	5 years

### **Overview of Codes and Themes**

Data collection and analysis were completed as outlined in chapter three and all quotations presented are verbatim from the participants. Some sections of longer quotes were removed for clarity and coherence of themes but the meaning and intent of the participants' were not altered in anyway. The eight themes were developed from reviewing the full transcripts and identifying relevant codes that emerged from each interview. These codes were then combined to create larger themes that related and responded to the research question for this study.

#### **Theme 1: Presidencies Often Last too Long and Presidents are no Longer the Right Person for Their Institution**

The findings in this theme represent the belief from almost all participants in this study that there comes a time when presidencies should end and that many presidents stay past that time. There were a number of references to a tenure of 10 years being the point at which presidents should reflect on the time behind them and what they are potentially able to do in the years to follow. President Steven Gibson expressed this when he said,

What I had always learned is, people stay too long. And knowing when to exit is critical. I have read the histories of several of my predecessors, and in most cases they stayed too long. Once you've been president of an institution for at least 10 years, you really need to begin to think about whether there are diminishing returns from your continued involvement.

Because at the 10 year mark, if there are still problems, it is either because you created them or you couldn't solve them in the first place. So I think in 10 years, you've either put your mark on that institution or you haven't (Personal communication, September 16, 2015).

The concept of diminishing returns is consistent among the participants although President Gibson was the only participant who referenced that the president may actually be a cause of some issues later in their tenure. Leaving a mark or a legacy was a common goal of presidents and was tied to their interest in achieving a balance of staying long enough to get the job done but not so long as to tarnish their legacy.

Knowing when to end a presidency was an aspect of this theme and has been discussed in chapter two and was referenced by a number of participants as well. Perspective about the value of a presidency and when to step away from a role that provides such positive reinforcement can often be missing and participants discussed this as a challenging decision to make. Many presidencies that are going well are difficult to leave and those in the position find that while the presidency has done quite well, the next set of challenges are likely better met by the next set of leaders:

After 14 years of being president, I was living on borrowed time, I think now the average life span is about five or six years or something. So when things are going really well, you say to yourself, "why should I leave?" That's a typical one to come to grips with to know when it's appropriate for you to pass the baton to the next generation of leaders. I had to say on a personal basis it's a real struggle when things are going incredibly well and then without telling anybody you are thinking about, 'okay I am going

to... in another two years or whatever be gone and how do I make this transition function as effectively as we possibly can?’ my feeling was that if I had to choose to stay on for another one or two years, the university would not be able to resolve those problems and it may be better to have a new group of people coming in where they have five or six years to work on these problems and have that kind of organizational longevity in dealing with the challenge (Howard Phillips, personal communication, September 21, 2015).

There is an acceptance of the reality of most problems and how presidents come to realize that while they continue to enjoy and benefit from the role, their impact and effectiveness may be waning. President Phillips’ comment reiterates the inability of a president to resolve problems in the later years of their presidency and emphasizes the need to allow a new set of leaders to emerge and take office.

The shrinking tenure of presidents and the number of presidencies that end negatively has been well documented and is described more fully in chapter two, but an often under-investigated trend is leaders who stay too long in their role. President David Jones stated that he “wanted to leave before anyone thought I should” (David Jones, personal communication, August 10, 2015) and he believed that this was something his predecessor did not do and was a mistake he did not want to repeat. A challenge can also arise as the president becomes bigger than the institution itself, which can become more likely as a tenure extends. President Jeffrey McDaniel commented on this during his interview by sharing:

There's always some dysfunction at the end of a long term and you can argue that there are cases of presidents who stayed in office, most people would agree, too long and lost that sense of ironic distance between self and institution (personal communication, September 2, 2015).

Longer tenures can lead to reliance on the outgoing leader and their power and authority, which can cause the dysfunction mentioned by President McDaniel. As many organizations become a reflection of their leader, presidents must guard against staying so long that there is no distance between the two. The concept of distance (ironic or otherwise) between the president and the institution can also be a common problem, as the names and identities of the president and the institution can almost become synonymous and interchangeable. The dysfunction at the end of the term is further illuminated in theme four as the community's relationship to the president changes over time.

As a president's term extends there can be a loss of interest and focus on the normal day-to-day activities of the presidency. Past experience can provide a sense of comfort and allow situations to be seen as typical and ordinary for presidents who then respond by instinct rather than through a process. President David Jones described his own experience with this as part of his realization that he should examine how much longer he should remain in the presidency.

Once you have done certain things that are common several times and have become old hat, you pretty much have a sense for it. You know how to do things and I think early on I was much more concerned about process and later on became probably more devoted to outcome. I watch

people staying in office too long and they become a little jaded and they did become less reliant on process, more reliant upon instincts, intuitions, and I could see that I started to do that. But for me, I could begin to sense this transition, rely more upon gut feel and my intuitions. It just becomes a challenge to be invigorated and enthused if you can't give it a full effort or feel like you are doing it for the first time (personal communication, August 10, 2015).

The concept of functioning on instinct and intuition provides important context to the evolution of a presidency. Experience is consistently seen as a value in any role but this statement from President Jones brings to light the potential negatives that can accompany experience. This can be described by the concept of heuristics that was described in chapter two in which one of the weaknesses of this approach was how it can be impacted by the “idiosyncratic biases of the decision maker” (Davis and Davis, 2003, p. 65). As the tolerance for repetitive issues and concerns decreases, the interest in quicker and easier answers can lead to a president relying on past decisions and results to deal with a constantly changing environment and atmosphere. This misalignment of principles to the current environment leads to the second theme identified from the presidential interviews.

## **Theme 2: Presidents Need Principles for Decision-Making That Adapt Over Time**

It has been previously stated in chapter two that “at some point, the chief executive’s talents will no longer be matched to the strategic challenges facing the company” (Freeman, 2004, p. 52) and the president must either evolve or step aside and

allow a new person or team to step into their roles. Presidents have to approach the role with a philosophy or principles that guide their decision-making approach with the recognition that every situation is different. President Howard Phillips described his approach as follows:

I think it is important to have a clearly articulated vision, how you want the institution to go and secondly, this is something that's often neglected, is that you need to have an understanding of how complex organizations behave. They are not lock step organizations, they have lots of moving parts and hierarchical structures and many, many different constituencies and you need to understand how they function because different types of decisions require different kinds of decision-making processes.

Sometimes forming a committee, which all universities do instantaneously for most issues, is the right thing to do and there are other times where it's really not wise. So you have to work at the type of decisions and think about the compatibility of that in terms of what process you would set in motion (personal communication, September 21, 2015).

President Phillips notes the importance of understanding not only the complexity of universities as organizations but also the importance of understanding different types of decisions. Utilizing the appropriate decision-making process can make a great deal of difference depending on the factors and constituencies involved. The added stress of multiple constituencies has also been a common theme from chapter two and from the research interviews.

Involving constituencies in decisions the right way is essential and is the focus of President Stanley Johnson's reflection:

This business of the blank sheet of paper versus the concrete is important. People want you to have thought things through, they want you to want their advice and then you'll make a decision. What they don't want is when you come to them and say, what should we do? They want you to have thought it through and similarly they want to get involved before you're telling them the decision statement has already been made (personal communication, August 19, 2015).

President Johnson (personal communication, August 19, 2015) spoke a great deal about the importance of involving constituencies in decision-making but also ensuring that a president leads the team. He shared the concept that a leader cannot come forward with a fully formed plan that is ready to implement and still gain the buy-in and support of constituents. He felt that it was equally as fruitless to bring forward a blank sheet of paper and thus provide no leadership whatsoever. This analogy helps to explain a way to engage with constituencies whose interests and needs change over time while still leading the institution forward based on the president's principles and purpose.

These principles should be articulated clearly and early on in the presidency. The importance of starting with goal setting will be examined further in theme six but President David Jones explains the articulation of goals in the following two excerpts from his interview:

I entered the presidency with the commitment to a planned future with the focus on student experiences. I would like to think that is the kind of

statement to characterize my entire time as president. It is really important to have an organization that's planning for its future, that's not to say that you don't change course, as time passes not to say that some of your priorities don't change but I think it is really important to have a sense of where you want to go, what you want to be and how you want to get there. I think it is real important that an organization, it certainly is true of me personally, is driven by a desire to establish and fulfill goals (personal communication, August 10, 2015).

The clarity of these goals sets the stage for the university and establishes expectations for the organization. President Jones' simultaneous focus on the need to sometimes change course illustrates an understanding of how organizations evolve over time. President Jones describes a forward-thinking approach that keeps an emphasis on the future while still addressing what is happening daily and, while priorities can shift, there remains a sense of an eventual destination and the path to get there. This is shown to be true for his approach to the organization but also for himself as a leader in his next statement:

I have an acrylic block on my desk that my wife gave me, I think the day I was inaugurated as president and it is a quote from Goethe that says – “The things that matter most must never be at the mercy of things that matter least.” I tried to live by that. Some days it was certainly hard, some days the things that mattered least seem to get in the way, and sometimes because others made it that way. But I would like to think that notion of primacy of the student expresses what matters most and that typically

drove me while I was president (personal communication, August 10, 2015).

The ability to sort through everything a president must face every day and identify the important items amongst the distractions is a key component to adapting to a changing environment. In addition, President Jones describes that others sometimes bring about these distractions and remaining steadfast while also sorting through all of the information presented is a both challenging and necessary skill (personal communication, August 10, 2015).

This is potentially a balancing act between the first two themes as presidents serve longer terms and rely more on heuristics they may also lose sight of what are actually the things that matter most at their institutions. A sense of security in personal beliefs and principles resonated throughout the interviews and is explained through the use of an excellent analogy by President William Stephens who believes leaders should, “secure your footing before you extend your reach. Which is not to say don’t extend your reach, just make sure of your footing before you do it. Good for mountain climbing and decision-making” (personal communication, September 29, 2015). These presidents all expressed a sentiment that a leader must have a sense of grounding within them if they want to be successful in leading others in both times of change and stability.

As the external environment, the university, and its many constituencies continuously evolve and change, a successful president’s approach shifts and adapts while their principles remain strong and steady. Feedback from these constituencies and from colleagues both internal and external to the institution has been described as an important part of the decision-making process for all presidents. Equally important to the

presidents in this study is the necessity to make decisions and not leave things up to chance or wait until a decision is essentially made due to inaction.

### **Theme 3: Presidents Have a Responsibility to Make Decisions and Gather Advice and Input in the Process**

The president of a university is thought of by many to be the most important person in the organization and the decisions they make can change the trajectory and future of the institution. The responsibility to make decisions cannot be underestimated as there are very few decisions that a president has the luxury to pass on to someone else. Simultaneously, the complexity of universities makes it very difficult for presidents to know every aspect of a situation in order to make decisions without input, consultation, and advice from a number of sources.

Universities are unique organizations that are both historic and modern and are an amalgamation of a number of different industries all under one roof. This uniqueness translates to the decisions and decision-making processes that must be utilized at a university. Chapter two outlined many of the differences between CEOs and presidents and between universities and businesses. President Jeffrey McDaniel served on corporate boards earlier in his career and was able to further articulate the differences between decision-making in the two worlds:

Just to learn the style of collegiate decision-making that you have within successful universities I think takes a lifetime; it's not a natural way in deciding things. It's certainly not the obvious way if you have had a background in government or in industry. You come into this and feel as though it's taking forever to get something done, and then one day you wake up, and you look

around and it's done. You know, I think you also have to learn to concede that not everything you imagine or assert is going to turn out to be so, that the vision itself belongs to a larger group. Serving on corporate boards, I've always been struck by the extent to which, as the CEO tells his story to the board, all the good things are the CEO's invention. That does not happen in universities, and anybody who claims that has been deceived (personal communication, September 2, 2015).

The time intensive nature of decision-making in higher education is highlighted in this comment and the unnatural way of getting to a resolution is also identified. The consultative nature of higher education in many ways defines the work of the field but can also be what gives it the reputation of being slow and "glacially bureaucratic" as stated by Padilla (2005). The ownership by the whole is also mentioned by President McDaniel and while the president may have the responsibility to make the decision, the success is shared with the community instead of being the result of one person's efforts (personal communication, September 2, 2015).

There are also very few decisions that can be made with a perfect and complete picture, and thus every decision has some level of doubt and insecurity about the final outcome. President Ian Morris describes the decision-making process in his interview as:

Depending on the topic you have to do more than just sitting in a room and deciding. Particularly on the campus, and campuses require more consultation than business, dramatically more. But there is some benefit to it because often people know things you don't know and I think over the years I've become more and more consultative because that's been effective. And I think I learned more by doing it and the years that went

by, I found that you can't consult too much and if you can consult you should do it, because you get better results, if nothing else. You've got to get all the facts and in the end you will never get all the facts you would like to have. But even if you get a complex situation regardless how much you consult there's still some ambiguity and some facts that are unknown and some outcomes not intended (personal communication, August 21, 2015).

His perspective on this is that presidents must involve others in the process and over time he actually found himself consulting more instead of less. The successes he had early on didn't lead him to believe in his own ability more but pushed him to seek out more information from various sources. He recognizes that you will never get all of the facts you would like and that ambiguity is a natural part of every decision.

The weight and significance of decisions that presidents make places significant pressure on each decision to be correct and for there to be minimal unanticipated consequences. Despite this obvious challenge, presidents must make a decision on behalf of the institution. President Margaret Jackson felt that presidents have a responsibility to act and describes her philosophy in the following way:

Eventually, in my opinion, you can delay decisions, which is making a decision. And that's not really what a president is supposed to be doing. Even if you make the wrong decision, given what information you have, I think sometimes my philosophy would be eventually try to make decisions in a timely fashion and get as much information as you can. But not keep on delaying it, especially if you've involved lots of people in the decision

making process, whether you know this is eventually going to, one way or another something is going to happen. I think stringing people out for too long doesn't help either (personal communication, September 8, 2015).

The concept that delaying a decision is in essence making a decision came up in a number of interviews and it was consistently expressed that it is the basic expectation of presidents to make decisions. One of the potential negative impacts of consulting with a number of people is that they then expect some decision or action to take place and the credibility of a leader can be lost if they do not act.

Consultation has been described by many of the participants as an essential part of the decision-making process but presidents do have an opportunity to define what role others will play in the process and at what level. President Gloria Taylor described one scenario on her campus during which she “told the campus that I believed in order to maximize our success we had to do it and so I said we were going to do it. What I didn't do, I didn't consult people on whether we had to do it or not. I consulted people on how we would do it” (personal communication, August 17, 2015). This approach still engaged her constituents but did so in a managed way that allowed them to be a part of the process without permitting them full control of it. Upon consulting with a number of people, the president is often the most informed person about a particular scenario or situation and is thus positioned to make the best possible decision on behalf of the institution.

Framing the process by which individuals will have input and what they will have input on is an important aspect of gathering feedback. President Peter Reed established this process with his vice presidents by “laying out the ground rules; and the ground rules were I wanted to be a successful president and when we have problems I wanted to find a right answer and I didn’t care of if it’s my answer or Joe’s answer so I wanted them to speak candidly and not be concerned about whether or not they disagree with my position, and you know that sort of lifted the clouds and allowed people to speak their mind, in a room with the door closed” (personal communication, August 26, 2015). His philosophy allowed him to hear a more authentic and less filtered set of opinions and perspectives than he might ordinarily have received from his subordinates.

President Steven Gibson emphasized defining metrics for achievement with a certain course of action with his philosophy that included, “getting a lot of people involved, getting a lot of inputs, marshaling the facts, setting clear criteria of what you are trying to achieve, and then making some decisions” (personal communication, September 16, 2015). His approach involves accepting inputs and then putting out an idea or set of recommendations for feedback. This allows him to check his own assumptions about the initial data gathering and the recommendation he has made for action. His approach allows others to shape the decisions he makes while remaining focused on making decisions that serve the institution’s best interests.

**Theme 4: Presidents did not Change Their Approach but Their Confidence and the Community’s Relationship with Them did Change**

Presidents did not perceive a change in their approach to decisions while they were in office but did experience greater comfort and confidence in their ability and preparedness for making the decisions presented to them. President Peter Reed shared that:

Over the 10 years, the process for decision-making did not change; what did change was my level of confidence in my own decision-making ability and my level of confidence in my presidency. I would have made changes if I encountered stumbling blocks along the way, but it went magically well”  
(personal communication, August 26, 2015).

This seems like a rarity nowadays as we hear about more and more presidencies failing but this president discussed a great deal about how his experience went well because he and the university were a good fit for each other at that particular time. He further described that his confidence grew over time and he would have made different decisions regarding personnel issues as he got more comfortable. This notion will be discussed more in theme seven.

At the end of a presidency there can be a certain reluctance to make significant changes that will then have to be explained to the next president and leadership. President Stanley Johnson discussed how the university didn't want to slow down at the end of his time in office and yet people were more likely to ask questions about strategy toward the end of his term. He reflected back that:

People would question me a little bit more than maybe they did previously. We did stuff that we didn't have to do and if we did it earlier on, we'd have been quizzed but the fact that we have been successful in other things, people thought,

they must know what they are doing when they have been successful up to now”  
(personal communication, August, 19, 2015).

This alludes to a reality where he had to initially build up the community’s confidence in him by facing more questions but that this ultimately allowed him more freedom after a number of successes. However, some of those questions were raised again as he came to the end of his term as the community felt some level of insecurity in the change in leadership.

The ending of a presidency can be incredibly challenging for an institution and a community. All of the unique aspects of a university are impacted differently and a longer tenured president’s departure can create ripple effects from the moment a retirement is announced. President Jeffrey McDaniel experienced this at the end of his 19 year tenure.

I had agreed, as part of the arrangement for me to leave, that there were certain jobs I would get done. There is a natural downturn or slowed rate of growth in private giving when you announce a departure. And a departure 19 years into the show is destabilizing. It doesn’t have to do with how much people love or dislike the president, it has to do with the longevity of human memory. And I was concerned about the prospect that my continuance by that time was stifling creativity and initiative, even the sense of ownership that people needed to do a good job.

You have people starting to invite you to the functions that you used to be invited to talk to their monthly leadership meeting, or to lay out a program for next year, and the purpose is to come so they can say

goodbye to you. And then the next time around you're not asked to come; you have to assert that you want to come. There's also the problem of getting out cleanly within one operating cycle. It has you going to your own funeral every night for a year. That had them diverted from their proper attention to university matters (personal communication, September 2, 2015).

He mentions a number of areas that were impacted by his planned retirement and as more and more presidents focus on fundraising as a key component of their role, the end of a term can hinder that effort. Donors may want to wait and support the institution when the new president comes into office rather than supporting the outgoing president.

Additionally, he shares that his normal activities became more of a farewell tour instead of remaining focused on the business of the institution. He also had to convince others to stay focused on the tasks at hand which became harder as his term came closer to its end. His recommendation of departing within one operating cycle from when the retirement is announced is an important recommendation and one that he was not able to accomplish in his own retirement.

Maintaining focus at the end of the presidency was a common theme in the interviews and President Margaret Jackson shared an experience of managing her second strategic planning process during her tenure and the community's weariness regarding this effort;

Trying to get people engaged is a lot harder than when I first started out, because they are weary and skeptical. But people did pull together and I did bring in some outside people to help with that. It was not quite as

inclusive as the first one, which in hindsight probably would have been a better thing to do, but we were behind the gun. We really needed to get this thing done, get it out there and get started on it, to bring it to the institution (personal communication, September 8, 2015).

Her experience with having to convince the community to buy into another process is indicative of what many participants experienced. There is a realization that a new leader will be coming, and similar to donors, the community is deciding what energy to spend on the leader who is leaving versus preparing for the next administration. Some of these processes that occur later may lack the same energy as previous ones and the results may fall short of expectations. Many of the presidents described this as a dysfunction, slump, or downturn that is a natural part of the end of a longer presidential term. The participants generally felt that this was not from their lack of interest and desire to continue moving forward, but more because of changes in the community's reactions and response to them as the departing leader of the institution.

### **Theme 5: Managing Crisis Requires Swift Action and Integrity**

Inevitably, every president will face some moment of crisis during their presidency. The crises that were described by participants included natural disasters, NCAA investigations and sanctions, student protests/riots, student death, financial upheavals, and many more challenging situations. These crises are almost never predictable and the participants noted that the outcomes cannot be predicted or guaranteed, even after everything seems resolved. No matter the scenario, the common themes in successfully managing these crises seemed to be acting with appropriate speed and integrity. President Frederick Simmons outlined the significance of not handling

crises well when he stated, “I have always believed that there are only two things that get a university president fired, one is a major athletic scandal and the other is to have a 100 million dollar deficit in our hospital budget” (personal communication, September 1, 2015).

One other aspect of crisis management for presidents is that many of their normal approaches and philosophies regarding decision-making are typically set aside until the crisis has subsided. President Steven Gibson, who spoke at great length about gaining a great deal of input when making a decision, described his approach to a crisis as follows:

I would say my philosophy was more a benevolent dictator and that is I didn't have the time to do extensive consultation, debate, and discussions. So it was a much more rapid fire top-down approach. But that lasted for about a year or two, and then I began to step way back into a more collaborative model. I believe in contingency theory. I believe that leadership styles do have to change depending on the times, and during a crisis you really have to take control of the situation if you are going to survive and move on (personal communication, September 16, 2015).

His use of contingency theory and matching his style to the situation is a theme among other presidents, although others did not specifically reference the theory by name. He identified a need to utilize and display a different style of leadership in the aftermath of a crisis on his campus and deal with the backlash and ramifications of that choice if and when they occurred. He returned to his more natural style once the crisis had been managed and he no longer had to exercise such a strong sense of control over the institution.

President Howard Phillips and his university faced an incredibly challenging crisis that required a herculean effort by him, the university, and the surrounding community to overcome. One of the themes of all of these crises is the importance of time and how none of them are able to be addressed at the pace at which one would prefer. He describes a need to visualize where the institution needs to be on the other side of the crisis and the importance of remaining steadfast on getting there:

If you know where you are going you wouldn't have to take two years to figure out what you wanted to do during the crisis because that had to be first solved in a matter of months, not years. So that's another one where you had to do two things at once. In a way you had to continue to think about how you keep this community intact during an incredibly traumatic crisis. What can I do to keep this community together, not just the university but all the town and everything else? So you had to embark on a broad communication strategy to help people understand the many dimensions of the problem that you had to deal with, particularly that you had these thousands of other students who are planning to get their degrees, go on and get jobs. You couldn't just shut down the institution. We had lots of other obligations (personal communication, September 21, 2015).

In this description of the crisis, President Phillips lays out the myriad issues that had to be addressed and that they had to be handled both immediately and simultaneously. The reality of the large number of constituencies that have been discussed a number of times throughout is that these constituencies are often reliant on

the institution to survive and thrive. Presidents in these situations have less time to mourn or lament what has happened and have a responsibility to act while others are afforded an opportunity to process what has happened at their own pace. Another important aspect of managing crisis at a university is that the majority of them must be handled publically, with scrutiny from both internal and external forces. This requires significant communication and a level of integrity that is not expected from many other leaders.

Issues with NCAA athletics and investigations were raised by almost every president and managing this aspect of the university enterprise seems to take up an inordinate amount of time and is a source of constant concern for presidents. Investigations have become commonplace on many campuses and the debate on the value versus cost rages on every day across the country. A topic that was raised by several participants was a decision regarding eliminating some athletic teams from their campus. In particular, the experience of President William Stephens is particularly enlightening because a decision to eliminate the football team transitioned into a situation of racial tension due to some personnel issues tied to the decision to eliminate football. Issues of student unrest for any reason require a swift but delicate touch and this scenario is no different, as can be ascertained by President Stephens' description:

There was a time at Beta — would have been about a middle of my presidency — when I decided to cancel the football program, even though it was doing quite well; but there were certain problems with it, costing a lot of money and the state was cutting our budget a lot and it was believed that this person whose contract I later did not renew was prompting

students to call me a racist and there was a student chant of “Stephens wants Beta Black free in ’93,” as I recall. So I called a town hall meeting and without a podium stood up on the stage and said how I have heard that there are those who say that “Stephens wants Beta Black free in ’93,” and how that’s the most racist thing I’ve ever heard because somebody is saying it related to the canceling of the football program and I don’t believe Black students come to Beta just to play or watch football so who is saying that? There was silence but I knew the students understood (personal communication, September 29, 2015).

This approach may not have worked for many presidents but President Stephens obviously had a great deal of credibility on the campus and students knew him to be a person of integrity. This is also an example of the complexity of a university, as the typical issue regarding the elimination of the football team would be centered on finances, alumni giving, and other similar issues but this crisis took on a different tone that had to be addressed while also dealing with the anticipated reactions to eliminating a team.

The other area of NCAA crisis on a campus is centered on investigations for any number of reasons. Two participants discussed their experiences at length and the importance of conducting the investigations in a transparent and forthright manner. When President Scott Baker was challenged on his decision not to unilaterally defend their athletic team prior to an investigation, he responded:

I am going to investigate and then any defense of the program will be based on what we find out when we complete the investigation. That wasn’t universally

popular but I stuck to my guns and it became more difficult when our investigation showed that we were cheating (personal communication, August 24, 2015).

He believed that the only way for his team to maintain credibility was to have a full investigation and then move forward with the results from that in an open and honest way. This one situation defined his time at that institution and is still how many remember him today.

President Ian Morris experienced an NCAA investigation within weeks of assuming the presidency and while he was shielded from some of the initial criticism since the issues did not occur on his watch, he had the responsibility to address the charges. His comments address his philosophy regarding not just the investigation but how he proceeded to make changes at the institution to hopefully prevent such an incident from happening again in the future;

Some on the Board were uneasy but I decided I was going to hire an outside lawyer to investigate this. I changed the reporting relationship so that the compliance director reported through me and to the general counsel and we said we're just not having more compliance problems, people get fired when they have problems here and that's 22 years ago. It probably helped that I was so new and I was not part of the problem since the situation occurred before I got there. I and others felt this was a question of integrity for the university and I consulted of course. It made people uneasy with the idea that we were going to lose some scholarships but it made others really pleased that we were just not going to be tolerant

of compliance issues. The NCAA is establishing rules and you are expected to follow them (personal communication, August 21, 2015).

President Morris was able to identify potential causes of the infractions and took action after the initial penalties to avoid issues in the future. Additionally, his swift action, despite being a brand new president, sent a message to his community that the rules mattered and the university was going to address such occurrences with integrity.

Each of these crisis events is unique in how it occurred and in its final resolution. The presidents all faced a distinct set of challenges dictated by the crisis but there were similarities in how every one of them attacked the problem. They acted quickly and decisively in addressing the crisis by concentrating their efforts on the most important and pressing aspects of the crisis first. Their efforts were beyond reproach in each case and ensured that the story would be about the crisis and those most affected instead of on how the university addressed the issue. With an eye toward what the institution would look like upon resolution, the presidents were able to take control of the crisis and try to make the best from what were incredibly challenging situations.

#### **Theme 6: Presidencies Should Start With Setting Goals and Building Relationships**

Presidents usually begin their tenure with an understanding of the mandate or set of expectations as defined by the Board or other constituencies. Participants shared that the expectations for their presidencies included increasing rankings, getting the school moving, serving the state where they resided, managing a financial/accreditation/athletics situation, and one particularly intriguing directive was to “create order out of chaos without killing the entrepreneurial spirit” (Stanley Johnson, personal communication, August, 19, 2015). Some of these signify an immediate set of issues to address while

others allow for and encourage a broader scope of responsibility and expectation. This varied set of objectives set a different initial course for each of the presidents and their institutions and provided different metrics for success in both the short and long term.

President David Jones expanded on this concept when he shared:

I think ideal organizations work on their goals and objectives, oftentimes they have goals that sound really good but they are not easy to obtain related to measurable outcomes. So, from the very beginning we worked on not just identifying the goal or objective for the institution or *units* within the institution but also to look at how it could be measured for progress (personal communication, August 10, 2015).

Understanding what success looks like is an important aspect of goal setting and President Jones establishes the need to know both goals and the metrics in order to recognize when they have been achieved.

In many fields, most individuals would state that relationships are the key to achieving an organization's goals, and this is definitely true for higher education as well. While presidents have automatic positional and political power, this can only accomplish so much in such a large, diverse, and complex organization. President Stanley Johnson described the importance and value of this when he shared, "this is a community of relationships, but it's not much hierarchy, it's much more about relationships and you got to be out there and about making those relationships" (personal communication, August, 19, 2015). The key for a president is to identify priorities around relationships and to commit the time to building and maintaining the valuable and relevant relationships for their role.

Selecting and developing the right relationships while avoiding those that are not authentic and detrimental can be a challenge. President William Stephens advises new presidents to look out for:

People who want to buddy up to them and sort of suggest that they are the source of intelligence and you have to be polite and listen. But don't make commitments too soon because they in fact they might have a personal agenda and not be the right person (personal communication, September 29, 2015).

There can often be individuals who have their own agendas and see a relationship with the president as a way to further that agenda. The reality that these individuals exist only strengthens the need to identify and connect with the appropriate people and partners at a university.

President Frederick Simmons spent a great deal of time developing relationships with the government officials in his state due to both the necessity of their involvement and their proximity to his campus. He explained this necessity when he stated that:

They meet about a hundred yards away from our hospital so that was a blessing and a curse and they want to manage everything but I spent an awful lot of time getting to know the state and its governmental officials. I set that as a high priority and it was no big deal. I had an office near the Capital and it was easy for me to be down there a lot in comparison to other presidents in the state (personal communication, September 1, 2015).

These types of close relationships with Board members, government officials, and donors are necessary for the advancement of the president's agenda and the university enterprise. President Stanley Johnson recounted a number of instances where he would

attend events at the homes of local officials and, when he was just starting out as president, he set up appointments with a number of different individuals and would always go to their offices for the meetings to illustrate the value he placed on the relationship (personal communication, August, 19, 2015). The business of universities is accomplished through relationships and each president may have focused on different goals and objectives during their careers, but each of them underscored a critical need for allies and partners in order to accomplish those goals and objectives.

### **Theme 7: Personnel Decisions Require a Deft Touch and Courage**

Few presidents can go through a presidency of any appreciable length without having to address some level of personnel issues. Each president had at least one account of a personnel issue that they had dealt with during their tenure and it was the one area that had the most significant change from the beginning to the end of a president's tenure. Presidents who identified mistakes in dealing with personnel issues identified inaction on issues early in their career. President Peter Reed had allowed poor performance to linger in one area of the university and eventually had to fire an employee after several years of unsatisfactory performance. Reflecting back on this experience he stated, "as my presidency matured my tolerance for weak performance really went away and I approached personnel decisions much more quickly in the last three or four years" (personal communication, August 26, 2015). He went on to say, "I was far too tolerant early in my presidency and I think the reason for that tolerance was I was too focused on not upsetting the calm waters, for lack of a better word" (personal communication, August 26, 2015). President Frederick Simmons echoed this sentiment when he reported that should have been more direct and strict with those that reported to him "I was used to

a much more collegial environment and I tried to keep it that way and believed that we would get better results and I think I should have been tougher on some of my direct reports” (personal communication, September 1, 2015).

Another aspect of personnel issues that presidents identified was the need to have both a sure and subtle hand when addressing them. Two different presidents discussed situations with their CFOs that were no longer working out and the need for them to move on to another opportunity outside of the institution. One president recounted, “quietly pushing the CFO out and hiring another one,” (personal communication) due to the CFO’s inability to work with other senior leaders at the institution. Another president shared an instance in which they were able to work with another university that was a better fit for the CFO and get that institution to offer her the CFO role there. These situations have added complications because the staff members at these levels have relationships with board members and are often public figures as well. Terminating these staff members is often a public affair so presidents can be wary of taking action unless they are certain the situation will end in their favor.

### **Theme 8: There is a Value to Getting Advice and Perspective from Outside the Institution**

The value of establishing a set of external advisors was stated best by President William Stephens who described his advisory council as “useful in trying out ideas with people who were very smart, experienced in different fields, and yet, not my bosses” (personal communication, September 29, 2015). The perspective garnered from these external advisors was free from internal bias or interest and presidents were able to ask

questions of these individuals that they could not ask on their own campuses. There was a mixture of both formal and informal advising that occurred depending on the president.

These advisory individuals and councils looked very different based on the president, the institution, and the skills of the advisor. President Stephens had formalized an external council that he utilized regularly while President Margaret Jackson utilized external advisors on a more episodic basis for certain projects. President Frederick Simmons sought out some of the best in their respective fields to gather their advice on particular ideas and he would often implement their suggestions based on the success they had previously achieved. He would regularly connect with other colleagues across the country that could make his institution stronger (personal communication, September 1, 2015).

Both Presidents Jones and Gibson applied a mixed approach to gaining advice by involving both internal and external participants as advisors. President Jones would often “visit presidents of other institutions” (personal communication, August 10, 2015) and talk to leaders of other institutions at conferences and other meetings over the years. President Gibson created a “special group of trustees as well as outsiders” (personal communication, September 16, 2015) and he described the group:

There were seven as I recall, all but two either current or former university presidents, who I asked to join with some trustees to help me think about how we imagine the university. It was that group that we would try ideas out on and they would help us. They were very, very influential in altering my thinking about what we should do when we came back. So I had a lot of people that helped me brainstorm these, and then some

trustees who had very good strategic minds. So I relied heavily on their work (personal communication, September 16, 2015).

This group of advisors exhibited a balance of internal knowledge and experience and emotional and intellectual separation from the daily challenges of President Gibson's institution. This allowed them to provide him with unbiased and clear perspective about the opportunities and challenges at his institution. External advisors are able to see past the specific and daunting daily activities of the institution and deliver clarity regarding options and opportunities that might escape the internal community members.

### **Summary**

This chapter presents the data and findings on this study of university presidents and their decision-making processes during tenure in office. The themes that emerged through this study are (a) presidencies often last too long and presidents are no longer the right person for their institution; (b) presidents need principles for decision-making that adapt over time; (c) presidents have a responsibility to make decisions and gather advice and input in the process; (d) presidents did not change their approach but their confidence and the community's relationship with them did change; (e) managing crisis requires swift action and integrity; (f) presidencies should start with setting goals and building relationships; (g) personnel decisions require a deft touch and courage; (h) there is a value to getting advice and perspective from outside the institution.

Participants believe that there is an appropriate length to a term of office for a university president and ten years is the point at which many of them felt that a president should begin to examine the value of continuing in the role. At this point in a president's tenure, there is some belief that the president will be unable to resolve the major issues

that still exist at the institution and that some current issues may actually be the result of the current president. Finally, the repetition and routine nature of events and expectations at later stages of a presidency can lead to a president using heuristics as a basis for their response which leads to decisions that are less process-based and matched to the needs of the situation. This leads to lower quality decisions that fail to recognize the full context and nuances of a situation in order to resolve things with speed over effectiveness.

The decision-making of a president is guided by a set of principles, goals, and a philosophy that are established or affirmed at the inception of their presidency. Participants shared that their principles did not change over time but that confidence in their decision-making and ability as a president grew over time. Goals and priorities shifted throughout the presidency to match the needs of the institution and the environment surrounding it. Presidents identified the need to make decisions and not allow issues to linger and that this became easier the longer they were in office. Personnel decisions is a specific area in which presidents identified an evolving approach as they became more comfortable addressing poor performance directly rather than letting it continue.

Different crises may occur at any time in the life of a university and presidents must be prepared to take charge in these situations. Crisis situations will often force presidents out of their normal approach to events and require a focus on swift action and a reliance on integrity as a leader. Presidents have to be prepared to deal with a crisis whether it is their first week or last year in office. In times of crisis, it is still important for a president to work to maximize the potential benefit to the university once the crisis is resolved.

Relationships and gathering advice and consultation from multiple sources is vital to the success of a presidency. More than any other type of organization, universities are built on relationships. The president has a responsibility to make connections with the wide array of constituencies and make those individuals a part of their personal network and community. Presidents can also benefit from developing and maintaining a network of support outside the institution in order to gain a detached perspective on issues. This includes the need to gather data, advice, and perspective from a variety of sources when making a decision. Ambiguity will play a part in every decision and presidents will need to become comfortable making decisions without a full picture of the issue or the potential outcomes of the decision.

This becomes even more important in times of crisis and when dealing with personnel issues. The end of a long-term presidency can lead to dysfunction and challenges for the institution, particularly during the time period between the announcement of a presidential departure and the arrival of a new president. Once it is known that a new set of leaders will be transitioning in soon, the university community is less willing to support major decisions and commitments. Additionally, community members begin to shift their allegiance from the departing president and hold it closer to them while waiting for the new administration and the inevitable changes that will follow. This dysfunction can hold back progress at the institution for a significant period of time and also hinder past initiatives from continuing.

Presidents of universities face an incredible number and variety of decisions on a daily basis and each of these carries its own weight and value to the institution. Over time, presidents gain a greater level of comfort and confidence in their role and the

community they serve has greater faith in their ability. Decisions become easier and more routine and fewer aspects of decision-making are as challenging as they were earlier in the presidency. Through this evolution of the presidency, the role becomes easier while the recognition and praise for successes continue to increase. Successful presidencies can then extend beyond their time of effectiveness due to the close coupling of the university and the president and an inability for either to choose to separate. This impacts decision-making and all other aspects of the organizational enterprise. There is an appropriate length for a presidency and it will be different for each president and institution but the markers for this should be examined further.

**Table 5: Themes Derived From Codes**

Themes	Codes
Presidencies often last too long and presidents are no longer the right person for their institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reason for leaving/End of the presidency</li> <li>• Evolution of approach to role and decision-making</li> <li>• Power, authority, and confidence</li> <li>• Direction and guidance from the board</li> </ul>
Presidents need principles for decision-making that adapt over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication/Consultation/Advice</li> <li>• The presidency as a calling</li> <li>• Evolution of approach to role and decision-making</li> </ul>
Presidents have a responsibility to make decisions and gather advice and input in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach to decision-making</li> <li>• Importance of making a decision</li> <li>• Power, authority, and confidence</li> </ul>
Presidents did not change their approach but their confidence and the community's relationship with them did change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach to decision-making</li> <li>• Commitment, interest, and focus of the role</li> <li>• Power, authority, and confidence</li> <li>• Evolution of approach to role and decision-making</li> </ul>
Managing crisis requires swift action and integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mistakes made as president</li> <li>• Impact of their work</li> <li>• Power, authority, and confidence</li> </ul>

<p>Presidencies should start with setting goals and building relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building relationships</li> <li>• State of the institution when they came into office</li> <li>• Direction and guidance from the board</li> <li>• Research and knowledge about the role and higher education</li> </ul>
<p>Personnel decisions require a deft touch and courage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mistakes made as president</li> <li>• Power, authority, and confidence</li> </ul>
<p>There is a value to getting advice and perspective from outside the institution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building relationships</li> <li>• Research and knowledge about the role and higher education</li> </ul>

## **Chapter 5**

### **Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

This study was developed to better understand how a university president evolves during their tenure through the lens of the decision-making processes they utilized. The study examined decision-making utilizing Hambrick and Fukutomi's (1991) framework focused on how CEOs change during their time in office. Yukl (2010) shared that "more research is needed to examine and explain the processes that occur during a leader's tenure in office" (p. 385) and this study endeavors to fill some of that void. This chapter will present the interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations extrapolated from the findings of the research related to the question: How do university presidents' decision-making processes change during the "seasons" of their tenure (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991) in office?

#### **Interpretations**

This section will provide a description of what understanding was gathered regarding the evolution of presidential decision-making over time in office. This will then be utilized in developing the conclusions in the next section. The situations that were examined provided insight into the innumerable decisions faced by presidents which ranged from mundane to critical and existed in a context of both ambiguity and complexity (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996, p. 39). The combination of literature review and interviews has provided insight into the presidency as a whole and also created a new set of potential questions and areas for further research.

A president's paradigm and decision-making processes remained central throughout the entire study even though participants did not always use those exact terms.

The development and evolution of a president's decision-making was referenced consistently and for many presidents they did not feel that this changed as much as their confidence in themselves grew (Peter Reed, personal communication, date).

The value of consultation was a consistent theme for all participants and they recognized the need for advice due to the complexity of each situation and their inability to know enough about every aspect of their organization to make informed decisions. This is an area of divergence between the literature and the findings from interviews. Previous research showed a diminished focus on consultation and a more "narrow and restricted" (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) number and type of information sources. This was not represented in any of the participant interviews, which may be an example of how universities and presidents differ from corporations and CEOs. One president, Ian Morris, who had experience working in the business world described the university setting as requiring "dramatically more consultation than business and that you can't consult too much" (personal communication, August 21, 2015).

In regard to a length of tenure and its impact on decision-making, there is a lack of a definitive interpretation to be made. The study identified that it is challenging to define success in higher education except as an absence of failure. It seems that there are few presidents whose terms end abruptly for a lack of success but the majority end due to some failure or series of failures. This lack of a set of metrics to measure success makes it difficult to describe an evolution of decision-making over time. There was enough connection across both the literature and the interviews to identify that there is an ideal time at which a presidency has run its course.

Unfortunately, this study's focus was not specifically focused on that aspect of the president's tenure so there is really only insight into this question instead of a definitive answer. There is a consistent sense that presidencies should be long, but not too long, and that the time periods are different for each president, each university, and each point in time (Grusky, 1963; Eitzen & Yetman, 1972; Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991; all participants, personal communication). Tenures less than five years seem to not be long enough to get acclimated into the role and accomplish enough on behalf of the institution (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991). In contrast, many of the participants identified ten years as a time when they considered how much longer they should remain in office (Steven, Peter Reed, Howard Phillips, Margaret Jackson, personal communication).

The lack of clear measures of success for a university and president illuminated by this study also presents an area for further examination and research. There are similarities between CEOs and presidents and the reality that two out of five CEOs fail in their first 18 months (Charan, 2005) presents a concern for presidents as well. CEOs typically have clear measures of success and yet they often still fail to meet those expectations. The ambiguous expectations of a president and the large number of publics they must answer to (Padilla, 2005) make it even more challenging that they might not live up to expectations. This also raises the possibility that for a late tenure president, the definition of success is to simply avoid failures.

Presidents themselves are often the only people who can determine if they are still committed and pushing to the end of their tenure. There are rarely any outside signs of dysfunction and the history and credibility that presidents have created allow for minor issues or changes in approach to be overlooked. There remains a shared responsibility

between the president and his or her publics if they reach the season of dysfunction. Presidents are responsive to their community. Among community members, the interest and appetite for continued change over a long tenure can dissipate and shift to a hope for a more stable and comfortable environment. While some presidents may continue to push for larger strategic change later in their career it is not clear if that will be accepted and supported by members of the community. This puts presidents in an unenviable position to be eventually judged for many realities that are out of their hands to control and influence. It remains that this is a most challenging job and that those who are called to do this must manage a myriad of people, responsibilities and expectations in a role that only has slight similarities across institutions and contexts.

### **Conclusions**

This section discusses the five conclusions drawn from this research study.

#### **Conclusion 1**

*There appears to be a time when a presidency has outlived its effectiveness but the length is different for each president and it is difficult to identify during the presidency.*

Presidencies can serve in their role anywhere from a few months to over twenty years but the average tenure of a university president has diminished significantly over the last 100 years from 9.5 years in 1929 to 5.2 years in 2005 (Padilla, 2005; Martin, Samuels, and Associates, 2004). Presidents require time to become effective in their role and the average tenures of 5.2 years do not allow presidents to reach their full potential (Padilla and Ghosh, 2000). There are innumerable factors that can impact a president's tenure including; not coping with innovation and change, misreading the competition,

fulfilling the wrong vision, clinging to an inaccurate view of reality, ignoring vital information, and identifying too closely with the organization (Finkelstein, 2003, p. 1). One of the other major challenges for a presidents in extending their tenure is that the breadth and depth of the role of a president is beyond what many people can be trained to do and in fact, in most other countries, the role of a university president is much more narrow and limited in both scope and authority (Rosovsky, 1990; Kerr and Gade, 1989). The complexity of a university exacerbates these factors and makes it challenging for some presidents to maintain longer tenures in office.

Despite these challenges, some presidents are able to remain in office for an extended period of time. There has been significant coverage of presidencies that end quickly and abruptly but we rarely read about presidents that stay for a very long time. Padilla and Ghosh (2000) noted that every presidential departure impacts an organization as “turnover at the top of organizations has its virtues and its costs, and too little of it may be as bad as too much” (p. 30) and it can “tax the adaptability of faculty and administrators” and “result in slower change and less responsiveness throughout the institution” (p. 37). Balancing the negative impact of too frequent turnover with the risk of an extended tenure that no longer serves the institution is the task of every university.

Universities and presidents must find the point in which a president’s effectiveness has peaked and select a new leader to transition prior to settling into a state of dysfunction. The question that must be further studied is how to identify and predict when that time is for each president. Every president in this study had examples of people that had stayed too long and referenced their own concerns about the length of their tenure. President Steven Gibson referenced this when he shared, “what I had always

learned is, people stay too long. And knowing when to exit is critical. I have read the histories of several of my predecessors, and in most cases they stayed too long. Once you've been president of an institution for at least 10 years, you really need to begin to think about whether there are diminishing returns from your continued involvement" (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Part of this phenomenon was illuminated by this study and will be further outlined in the next conclusion.

Additionally, when presidents have long tenures, their time in office is rarely thought of as anything other than a success and thus long tenures are generally considered to be a positive thing for an organization. Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) illustrated the difficulty in determining the appropriate length of time for a successful presidency when they found that "it is only after ten years, that the improvement (of the organization) is substantial." In their study of NCAA coaches, Eitzen and Yetman (1972) went on to say that a "disproportionate number of coaches ended their career at a school with last-half records poorer than their first" (p. 115) and that the careers of most long-term coaches could be described best with an "inverted U performance line over time in office"(p. 115). This identifies low achievement at both the beginning and end of a term with a peak throughout the middle. The lack of concrete measures of success will be examined further in this study's third conclusion, but it is a contributing factor to the difficulty in determining an appropriate time to conclude a presidency.

Presidents have a sense of this timing but expressed difficulty in making the choice and determining how long was too long. President David Jones expressed his desire to "leave before anyone thought I should" (personal communication, August 10, 2015) and other presidents agreed with this when asked. Age was not discussed

specifically in the literature as a factor in the diminishing success of a president although several participants mentioned both a desire to enjoy life after retirement while they still could as well as concerns about health. Age is potentially an aggravating factor in a president's life cycle in office similar to health, family/personal factors, and other personal factors. While a younger president may not reach a time of retirement, the impact of a long tenure would be similar but the result might be an interest in moving to a different university rather than retirement.

Presidents also noted that a presidency can be too short or too long and President Steven Gibson felt that "if you are in it less than 10 years, like you are five years in or so on, I'm not sure what you can accomplish in that time period. So, I think in 10 years, you've either put your mark on that institution or you haven't" (personal communication, September 16, 2015). Interestingly, although most of the participants of this study identified 10 years as a suitable length of a presidency, half of the participants stayed in office for 14 or more years. In the end, determining the appropriate length of tenure for a president is incredibly challenging and Eitzen and Yetman (1972) note that there is some variation in when presidential effectiveness may cease but that longevity does have a significant effect on the performance of an organization.

## **Conclusion 2**

*There appear to be signs of when a president has moved into a state of dysfunction.*

There can often be an inability for a president still in office to identify the signs that it is the appropriate time for their presidency to end. However, in examining their tenure retrospectively, a number of participants were able to identify trends in their own

tenure that led them to the decision to step down and they were also able to give examples of other presidents who had stayed too long. Several presidents in the study referenced presidents from other institutions that stayed too long and how some of their decisions were arbitrary and showed a level of comfort that would have been evident earlier in their tenure (Jeffrey McDaniel, personal communication, September 2, 2015). President David Jones shared a perception that some long-term presidents “become a little jaded and less reliant on process and more reliant on instincts, intuitions, and I could see that I started to do that” (personal communication, August 10, 2015). Participants valued process and consultation as part of their decision-making and a loss of this due to a loss of interest is another sign of dysfunction in a presidency.

Some of the other signs that presidents identified were a loss of interest in routine events and responsibilities. President David Jones expressed a lack of “task interest” (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991) regarding an annual faculty assembly and new student orientation speeches as it became a “challenge to be invigorated and enthused and to give it a full effort or sound like you are doing it for the first time” (personal communication, August 10, 2015). While these would be important symptoms of decline, the president would have to be self-reflective enough to identify them and have willingness to either take action to address the change in attitude or determine it was time to step away.

The literature, along with the seasons theory, state that consultation would normally decrease during the season of dysfunction but the participants in the study did not reflect this in their own experiences (Hambrick and Fukutomi, 1991). It is not possible to know if the quality of the information provided to presidents changed over time but the literature argues that the sources of information “cater to the CEO’s

information preferences” and eventually “filter and mold” (p. 726) what information they provide. This lack of accurate and unbiased information is problematic and is compounded by reliance on past success and a paradigm that has worked with previous decisions. While participants reported that they maintained a high level of consultation from both internal and external sources, the quality and accuracy of that advice is not known.

As has been noted earlier, the presidency is not an easy role to walk away from and many presidents may elect to stay rather than accept that these issues would negatively impact their overall momentum, successes, and legacy. “In the absence of mandatory retirement policies, each passing year in office brings a greater likelihood of the CEO’s continuing tenure” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 738). Freeman (2004) described this as the “ego problem” that can typically occur late in tenure and prevents a president from surrendering the prestige and power associated with the position.

Although there are a number of potential indicators of a presidency in decline, they are most often unseen and those that are identified tend to be brushed off, explained away, or justified as eccentricities. It often is not until individuals and the institution can gain some time and distance from the leader’s tenure and examine it with a more critical eye that the success or failure of the presidency is even discussed or measured.

### **Conclusion 3**

*There are no clear standards for success in the academic presidency and success can be perceived as a lack of failure.*

There is an absence of concrete measures of success within the highest echelons of higher education leadership, making it challenging to determine the success or failure

of a university president. It is important to note that the effectiveness of a president is not linked necessarily to tenure, but to “his ability to administer, lead, and act in a manner commensurate with the needs of the institution” (Peterson, 1975). With this in mind, the challenge presented here is not that the years are the cause of concern, but rather the president’s response and maturation in the role over time.

The formative studies for the seasons theory by Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) were the work of Grusky (1963) and Eitzen and Yetman (1972). These two studies focused on the effectiveness of Major League Baseball teams and college basketball coaches respectively. These are two arenas where success can more easily be measured with wins and losses. In a university, the measure of success is more mercurial and harder to define. This has led higher education to focus on success being a lack of failure rather than actual, defined success. We find that there is a greater focus on failure leading to the end of some presidencies and fail to consider what success might look like. Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue (2013) defined four factors as “failure to meet business objectives, problems with interpersonal relationships, inability to lead key constituents, and difficulty adapting” but there is not a corresponding list of success factors. In fact, defining and measuring success is complicated further by the work of Fiedler (1972) who found that “even when there are great differences in training and experience, and performance criteria are reliably measured, relatively untrained and inexperienced leaders perform as well as those who are well trained and experienced” (p. 453). This brings into question the value of experience over time in office and notes that a number of factors both in and out of the control of a president can lead to success or failure. This can lead to a president who can stay in office for an extended period of time simply by

not experiencing failures rather than achieving success. The expectations of a community also allow a president who is no longer achieving major successes to remain in office, as there is an expectation that late term presidents will be “sound, aren’t going to change us too radically, and who would participate in the continuity of the institution” (Trachtenberg, as cited in Darden, 2009).

This desire for structure, stability, and comfort can allow a president to make few strides forward in their later years and yet still be considered successful. This is even more evident with presidents who saw their institutions through significant crises during their tenure. The power gained through these crises allows them to “maintain their authority and position” (Ocasio, 1994) and strengthens both the community’s commitment to them as well as the president’s confidence in their paradigm. The hero stories of presidents who brought universities through these crises are remembered and connected to those presidents long after they have retired from the presidency (Howard Phillips and Steven Gibson, personal communication, September 21, 2015 and September 16, 2015). The desire for stability combined with the significant commitment to a president, the direction they have laid out for the organization, and their power grows as the need to stay the course is reinforced (Ocasio, p. 286). The president’s “beliefs and practices become institutionalized and the incumbent’s actions become taken for granted and his or her power are no longer questioned” (p. 287).

As the president comes to the end of their tenure, “job mastery gives way to boredom; exhilaration to fatigue; strategizing to habituation” (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, p. 731) and “executives may show few signs of this malaise” to the public at large but “inwardly the spark is dim; openness and responsiveness to stimuli are diminished”

(p. 731). This lack of outward expression further exacerbates the assumption of continued effort and drive within presidents and leads to a question for further research which is, with so many presidencies ending in an early, abrupt, and tragic way, has the measure of success fallen to simply not being removed from the role of president?

#### **Conclusion 4**

*Most change in a president's paradigm and decision-making approach appears to occur early in their tenure and early success leads to confidence and potential entrenchment late in a tenure.*

Presidents are selected with an expectation that their paradigms fit the immediate needs and environment of an institution and that they will be able to initiate significant change and address present issues (Shen & Cannella, 2002; Vancil, 1987). New presidents typically come into a university after a time of disruption and instability stemming from the succession and there exists a need and expectation to provide stability and exude confidence (Kesner & Sebor, 1994; Grusky, 1960). There is something of a conflict at this initial period though, as there is a desire for both stability and change that can be hard to accomplish. President William Stephens described this as “securing your footing before extending your reach. Which is not to say don't extend your reach, just make sure of your footing before you do it” (personal communication, September 29, 2015). This can create a conflict as the community expects and anticipates change and innovation but the president does not yet have the credibility to accomplish this until somewhat later in their tenure. This includes building relationships with the Board as well as the community and other constituents but this is typically done through accomplishments. There is a balance that must be struck by the president by doing

enough to gain credibility without doing so much without understanding the university, community, and overall environment.

This will often lead to immediate changes that align with the mandate given to the president when they were selected as well as to the areas where their existing paradigm can be most effective (Gabarro, 1987; Eitzen & Yetman; Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). Presidents are typically given one of two initial mandates — continuity or change — and these tend to be influenced by the success or failure of their predecessor and whether or not they are an internal or external successor (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). The theories guiding a president's initial efforts have been described as being either a theory of role (What am I supposed to do?) or a theory of effectiveness (How will I judge my performance?) (Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Bogue, 2013).

The “taking hold” stage (Gabarro, 1985) at the beginning of a presidency is a time when a president is expected to have a “clearly articulated vision of how you want the institution to go and an understanding of how complex organizations behave” (Howard Phillips, personal communication, September 21, 2015). It is also a time when it is harder to get members of the community to trust and buy into the efforts of the president as they have not yet proven themselves (Margaret Jackson, personal communication, September 8, 2015). This is also considered to be the one time that they will have a level of open-mindedness to potentially adjust or change their paradigm before their ensuing success leads to confidence and entrenchment (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). The expectation of establishing a vision and beginning to make change while “grappling with the nature of the new situation, trying to understand the tasks and problems, and assessing the organization and its requirements” (Gabarro, 1985) is the challenge that can lead to

many early exits for presidents. For those presidents who survive this initial set of challenges, confidence in their paradigm, decision-making, and leadership can rise very quickly. This leads to a further commitment in their approach to the role and continued early successes can lead to their power becoming institutionalized (Pfeffer, 1981; Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991).

Confidence was a central theme in participant interviews, ranging from dealing with crises to personnel issues. Confidence seems to be intertwined with the concepts of power and trust within the university context; as the organization begins to trust a president more, they are given more authority and power to make decisions. Presidents discussed that they were more tentative about some decisions early in their tenure and this evolved later in their tenure due to them feeling more secure in their footing and confident that they would be trusted with the decisions they were making (Peter Reed, Stanley Johnson, Howard Phillips, Frederick Simmons, personal communication). Hambrick, Finkelstein, and Mooney (2005) illustrate that “when success occurs for highly pressured executives, they will become extremely confident” (p. 481). This confidence is further bolstered by the media, an elevated public profile, as well as the executive’s “own self-attribution of success” and what has come to be called “executive hubris” (p. 481-482).

While there can be some brief reexamination of this paradigm during the seasons, successful, long-term presidents will often see a gradual and consistent growth in their commitment to their paradigm (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). In examining how decision-making changed over time in office, several presidents did not feel that there was significant change in their approach aside from confidence in their own “decision-

making ability and in my presidency” (Peter Reed, personal communication, August 26, 2015). This confidence can also lead to momentum that Miller and Friesen (1984) explained when they stated that an “organizational attribute is three times as likely to be followed by further change in the same direction as by reversal in direction” (p. 731). Momentum is considered to be a “nearly universal phenomenon among longer tenure CEOs” and the aforementioned reversals occur almost exclusively at times where there is a new CEO (p. 731).

Few, if any leaders would note they are entrenched in their own paradigms and decision-making processes. As stated in conclusion one, it is hard to identify, even for a president, when they have achieved all that they can in their presidency. The entrenchment that can occur often results from factors both in and out of the president’s control including an “adherence to an obsolete paradigm, reliance on a very narrow and highly filtered flow of information, and diminished task interest” (Miller and Friesen, 1984). This will lead to diminishing organizational performance as described by Eitzen and Yetman (1972). This can be exacerbated by a slowdown in learning as the president gets older and the presidency gets longer. Gabarro (1987) notes that after about “2.5 years in their jobs”, leaders “tended to engage in more incremental and routine learning than they did in their earlier period on the job” (Hambrick & Fukutomi p. 725). Katz (1980) affirms this in his conclusion that “task knowledge generally reaches a plateau in all job tenures, not only managerial ones” (as cited in Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991, 725).

As learning and interest diminish while confidence and power increase, it is easy to see why presidents could succumb to a certain level of tedium or boredom later in their tenure (Argyris, 1957). This is coupled with an institutional community that has enjoyed

stability and comfort during a long tenure and would not be quick to ask for the instability and trauma that often occurs with turnover. The universities they run will seemingly be functioning at an incredibly high level and the lack of attention to the larger and smaller issues at hand is a result of an uncoupling of executive leadership from the organization's environment (Hall, 1976, Romanelli and Tushman, 1988).

The typical response at this point would be for the CEO to “yield to someone with skills better suited to the issues at hand” (Freeman, 2004, p. 52) but this does not always happen. There is shared responsibility for prompting the transition or retirement of a leader when the time is deemed appropriate. Many participants discussed that they had to be the ones to raise the idea of them stepping down and that they were often met with disagreement from the community and the board (Stanley Johnson, Howard Phillips, Gloria Taylor, Jeffrey McDaniel, David Jones, Ian Morris, Steven Gibson, Margaret Jackson, personal communication, September 8, 2015). This leaves the question of who is ultimately responsible for the potential downturn at the end of a presidency; a president reliant on past accomplishments and utilizing an obsolete paradigm or a university community seeking stability and comfort, rather than continued growth and change?

## **Conclusion 5**

*Decisions are rarely made with perfect information and consultation is essential for decision-making processes within complex organizations.*

Presidents are tasked with making the best possible decisions on behalf of an organization while dealing with ambiguous stimuli (March & Cohen, 1974). This is complicated by the sheer complexity of universities and the role of president, which has been compared to a mayor of a large city and beyond that, of a large corporation (Asghar,

2013). Another complication for decision-making in a university is that this landscape does not allow a leader to “detachedly comprehend all facets of their situations, assess all options, and then select one that has a textbook correctness” (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). There are few, if any, correct answers for a university president as each situation is different and most every decision will be followed by unintended and unwanted consequences. Presidents know that “making important and difficult decisions comes with the territory” (Sanaghan, et al., 2008) but there are rarely easy decisions that are placed in front of presidents.

Presidents make a range of different decisions ranging from the bold to the incremental but in the end they have a responsibility to make a choice (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Presidents determine “how the problem is to be solved” (Vroom, 1973, p. 67) and typically the best solutions come after consultation from a variety of stakeholders and advisors. President Ian Morris believes that “regardless of how much you consult, there is still some ambiguity and some facts that are unknown and some outcomes not intended. Presidents need to welcome ideas from others and presidents and universities need ideas and visions that are bigger than an individual” (personal communication, August 21, 2015).

President Stanley Johnson illustrated his approach with a metaphor of a blank sheet of paper versus a concrete plan and how it was important to come with ideas but to not have the entire idea finished before consulting (personal communication, August, 19, 2015). This is an important point because presidents are expected to lead differently than managers. A manager can come into a conversation and gather input from people and then formulate their plan but presidents are expected to already have some sense of what

they want to do and why. President Steven Gibson's approach was to "seek information, talk to a lot of people, marshal the facts, have a set of clear criteria of what you are trying to achieve, put out ideas for people to react to, and then make some decisions" (personal communication, September 16, 2015).

Presidents receive advice and perspective from a range of different sources and many of the participants in this study discussed their efforts to engage with people both internal and external to the university. A university's board is one group that provides both consultation and supervision although at times this can be in the form of "uneven guidance, support, and oversight" (*The Leadership Imperative*, p. vi) and the president must make sense of this guidance despite its incomplete and inconsistent nature.

President Peter Reed described a process by which he established that he wanted to be a successful president and that he wanted to find the right answer to the problems they were facing and did not care who provided the answer so this allowed his vice presidents to share their thoughts more openly throughout his tenure (personal communication, August 26, 2015).

In times of crisis, presidents often must take on a different style and approach to decision-making and consultation. President Steven Gibson described himself as a "benevolent dictator, as I didn't have time to do extensive consultation, debate, and discussions" (personal communication, September 16, 2015) during the extended period of time his university was in crisis. He went on to say "leadership styles have to change depending on the times and during a crisis, you really have to take control of the situation if you are going to survive and move on" (personal communication). Once the crisis had passed, he went back to a more consultative approach to decision-making but also noted

that his new style was different than it was prior to the crisis. Other presidents reflected a similar time sensitive pressure that would not allow for a great deal of consultation and a need to articulate where the university needed to be at the end of the crisis and stay focused on that throughout (Howard Phillips, personal communication, September 21, 2015).

Finally, there is a need to balance the inputs received in order to stay true to the values of the institution and the president. Three different presidents discussed situations regarding their athletics programs and some violations that had occurred. Each of them received a great deal of input from both internal and external sources and each decided to act with integrity in dealing with these crises. Although not everyone was happy with the presidents' decisions in these situations, they did the right thing for the university. The last aspect of consultation is the ability to take in all of the feedback received and then making the correct decision in the necessary amount of time. Presidents do not have the luxury of not making decisions so they have to sort through everything and determine a course of action both they and the university can live with afterwards. In the end, the president has a responsibility to make decisions within an ambiguous environment and with incomplete information. Consultation is critical to gaining understanding and insight to have the most complete picture possible.

### **Recommendations**

This section discusses the study's recommendation related to theory, practice, and future research. This study reflects what was found in the literature including Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) who studied decision-making and found that some "choices are bold and quantum; sometimes they are incremental; sometimes they maintain the status

quo; and sometimes they are not choices at all, but rather a failure to generate and consider choices. But managers act (p. 22-23).” The end of a CEO’s tenure and the trend to lose interest in repetitive functions of the role was evident in both this study’s interviews and the literature, as evidenced by the work of Argyris (1957), who noted that CEOs roles are challenging but even they can be impacted by the tedium of a long tenure with similar tasks and responsibilities over time. The literature and the research aligned in a number of ways but these are just two examples of how the study reflects what was found across the literature examining CEOs and decision-making.

### **Recommendations Related to Theory**

The primary theory used for this study was the seasons of a CEO’s tenure model from Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) combined with an examination of decision-making processes over time. Yukl (2010) expressed that “more research is needed to examine and explain the processes that occur during a leader’s tenure in office (p. 383)” and this study attempted to better understand the decision-making process. The seasons theory is the lens by which decision-making was examined and is a beginning more than it is an end. There is still more to examine with both decision-making and the seasons theory and this could provide a great deal more clarity about the role of a university president. The data from interviews suggests that a president’s confidence in their paradigm and their presidency increases over time and this impacts their decision-making in a number of ways. While it does not inform the construct of the final season in the theory, it does provide support and validation for the first four seasons.

The decision-making processes described by the participants illustrate a clear set of expectations upon entering their presidency. This is followed by a movement to better

understand the institution's culture, history, and community before eventually settling into a long-term approach to their role. This research model did not provide clear support for the last season, as the interviews in this study failed to provide a clear understanding of the final season of dysfunction. All but one of the five characteristics of the seasons were clearly evident in the research, underscoring a clear relationship to decision-making.

A president's commitment to a paradigm follows much of the same trend identified in Hambrick and Fukutomi's (1991) work, as it grows from moderately strong to very strong over time in office. This and the characteristic of power are similar in that a president's growing confidence in themselves and their presidency leads to a strengthened belief in their paradigm and a consistent growth of their power. Although power was not a term that specifically embraced by participants in the study, their ability to accomplish new and challenging things both in an everyday environment and in times of crisis certainly illustrates the power they had on their campuses.

Task knowledge and task interest were represented in the research, as presidents reported that they continued to grow and learn about their role, their institution, their publics, and themselves. It is natural that a president would continue to learn more about their institution over time but it is evident that learning slows after the first two or three seasons. There are a number of factors guiding this but most notable is that there becomes less that the president does not know about the university as more of the institution is impacted by the president's decision making. In contrast, participants shared challenges with maintaining interest and focus on some aspects of the role in the later years and identified this as one reason some of them had decided to step aside. Recognizing and acting upon a noted lack of interest requires a high level of discipline

and self-knowledge, suggesting that only the president can identify this reality and take action on behalf of themselves and their institution.

Information diversity was not clearly illustrated through the interviews. Although presidents shared that they did not limit the amount of consultation they engaged in later in their tenures, they could not have known if their advisors were filtering the advice they were providing. However, presidents shared that they continued to consult at as high, or higher level, at the end of their tenure as they did at the beginning, which is not consistent with this aspect of the seasons theory (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991). Overall, Hambrick and Fukutomi's (1991) seasons theory translated well to the higher education environment aside from a few inconsistencies surrounding information diversity and would be useful in better understanding university leadership in future studies.

### **Recommendations Related to Practice**

Several recommendations for practice stemmed from the insights of this study, as follows:

- Presidents should maintain a broad, diverse, and robust set of internal and external advisors throughout their time in office. The perspectives shared by these advisors were incredibly helpful to participants in the study and helped them be of greater service to their institutions. This set of advisors should continue to challenge the president to learn and grow throughout their tenure by exposing them to new and different ways to examine each new situation.
- Presidents should establish and maintain an approach to making decisions that takes into account the unique nature of every situation, the university

environment, issues within the incident, and potential outcomes of the situation. This individualized approach may adapt over time but the process should be respected so that past experiences and a reliance on heuristics do not lead to making rushed and inappropriate decisions based on the biases of the president, the perceived speed at which a decision is needed, and false reliance on past precedent.

- Boards should work closely with presidents to establish clear and challenging expectations and goals each year of the presidency. These should be shared with the entire university community so they can support a president who, after ten years, is still trying to move a university forward rather than resting on past accomplishments. The university community shares a responsibility in this recommendation, as it can often be community members who block the progress and change that presidents are trying to lead.
- Once a set of goals and expectations is made there must be a transparent way to evaluate the president. This evaluation needs to be tied directly to decisions regarding compensation and extension of contracts and should be done on an annual basis. This process should provide presidents with feedback on their successes and areas of improvement as well as incorporate feedback from subordinates and board members.
- Inconsistency exists across many universities regarding the length of contracts and even the existence of contracts. Every university should have a regular process by which presidents' accomplishments must be taken into account in order to continue as president. While annual evaluations can have some impact,

contracts are the true statements of support for a president. After the first ten years in office, contracts should be less than five years in order to ensure that discussions and evaluations are occurring regularly to determine if the president is the right person to continue leading the institution.

### **Recommendations Related to Future Research**

As a result of this study, there are several recommendations for future research to further advance understanding of executive decision-making processes, executive tenure, and success in the academic presidency:

- There is still limited research on the full tenure of CEOs and there would be value to understanding the full tenure of an executive, instead of just the beginning, end, high points, or low points. A robust case study with a small number of participants would help provide a better understand the full seasons theory (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) and how a president may or may not progress through it.
- There is a lack of clarity regarding the metrics of success for an academic presidency. Retrospective case studies may be one way to examine a range of presidencies from multiple angles in order to determine if they could be described as successful. The current climate is too volatile, as a president can be quite successful but one wrong move could derail their presidency and lead to it being labeled as a failure. There is a need to illustrate and define what equates to success for a president outside of just remaining in the job and not being fired.
- Determining the optimal length of a presidency is another area for future research that could be tied to the previous two recommendations. The current assumption

that five years is too few and more than ten years could lead to dysfunction does not provide the level of guidance necessary to guide and support organizations and presidents.

- Information diversity and how individuals potentially alter, edit, or censor what they share with their superiors does not seem like a new concept. However, it is one that is not well understood. A greater understanding of how advisors alter information sharing to appease a president would benefit the decision-making processes of leaders. The lack of complete, accurate, and unbiased information only exacerbates the already challenging aspects of ambiguous decision-making.
- As this study utilized a broader sample of participants and an interview methodology, there is an opportunity to examine the same concepts in a different way. One potential method could be to utilize a case study methodology with fewer participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of the president and their decision-making from a number of sources. Another potential method could be to strive for a more intentional sample of presidents to provide for maximum variation of institutions and experiences to broaden the data that could be gathered.

### **Final Reflections**

This study was only possible because of the presidents who were willing to tell the stories of their journeys as university presidents. Each of these presidents has made a discernable difference in their respective communities and consistently improved the quality of higher education every day. Their sacrifices, including time with family and a normal life, in order to lead their universities are just some of the ways that they are of

service. There were many quotes and stories that resonated during this process but the down to earth nature of so many of their reflections made these seemingly larger than life characters more real and authentic. Universities are often described as the Ivory Tower and presidents are assumed to live in the upper and most remote point, but that is not the case. The integrity by which each of these presidents lived their lives and led their universities is a testament to who they are and the value their institutions received from them is unquestioned.

This study was intended to explore the decision-making processes of university presidents during their time in office and a significant amount of insight has been gathered about that question. There is still much to be learned about presidents' tenures and the processes they utilize when making decisions and both of these phenomena will never be fully understood. As universities continue to evolve and change, their leaders will have to do the same and the quest to understand them will include choices and roads chosen and roads kept for another day.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Invitation

Dear (President):

As a University President, you faced a number of decisions every day and while every decision was different, each of them was important. Your approach to the decision-making process throughout your tenure in office contains vital lessons that can assist us in better understanding the presidency. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in this study on the decision-making processes of University Presidents.

My doctoral research project is an exploratory study on the impact of time and tenure on the decision-making processes of University Presidents. While there has been a great deal of research on both the beginning and end of a leader's tenure, there has been little examination of change over the entire time in office. As tenures continue to shorten, it is vital that we better understand how one of the primary roles of a president, decision-making, is impacted by tenure.

Presidents will be asked to identify four moments in time from their last presidency to discuss and share how they approached these decision points, what factors were considered, who was involved in each of the processes, and what the result was of each decision. Each of these decision processes should come from different time periods in their presidency (beginning, early years, later years, final year) in order to best understand how their decision-making processes changed.

Data will be collected through interviews with you. Documents pertaining to your career such as a resume or Curriculum Vita will also be collected as background to the interviews. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately 60-90 minutes for the interview and an additional 30 minutes for review of the interview transcript for accuracy.

To confirm your interest in this study, please respond to this correspondence at your earliest convenience. I will then respond to schedule an interview during the months of July and August of this year. Thank you in advance for your consideration in this process and I look forward to potentially working with you in the months ahead.

Sincerely,



Timothy M. Miller, Doctoral Candidate  
Executive Leadership Program

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Exploring University Presidents' Decision-Making Process throughout their tenure in Office.

GW IRB Reference Number:

Principal Investigator: Susan Swayze Telephone number: 703-726-3773

Sub-Investigator: Timothy M. Miller Telephone number: 202-438-0954

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### 1) Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study by Timothy M. Miller of the George Washington University. Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to take part, or you may withdraw from the study at any time. In either case, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### 2) Why is this study being done?

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are/have been a university president. The purpose of this study is to investigate how tenure affects the decision-making processes of University Presidents. The researcher will conduct the interview over the phone. The analysis of the data collected will be conducted at the following location: Timothy M. Miller's private home with secure storage for materials.

A total of eight to twelve university presidents will be asked to take part in this study.

### 3) What is involved in this study?

If you choose to take part in this study, this is what will happen:

-The sub-investigator will

1) contact you via email to set up interview dates and times;

2) send you a copy of the interview questions and accompanying documents;

3) conduct an interview with you on the designated date, with the interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. The questions will focus on specific decision-making processes during different time periods during your most recent presidency.

-The interview will be audio recorded and completely transcribed by a transcription service.

-Interviews and documents collected will be analyzed in light of the research questions posed.

-The sub-investigator will provide you with copies of the interview transcript for your review.

-Final analysis will be conducted and the results and findings will be formally written

into the dissertation

-The sub-investigator will send you a copy of the results and findings after the analysis has been conducted and the conclusions have been written into the dissertation.

The total amount of time you will spend in connection with this study is approximately 2 hours; 60-90 minutes for the interview and an additional 30 minutes for review of the interview transcript for accuracy. If transcript is not returned within two weeks with accuracy edits, investigator will assume the transcript is accurate and the analysis process will begin.

4) What are the risks of participating in this study?

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, volunteers' participation in this study will present no more risk than they would experience in everyday life as this study is examining the decision-making processes they utilized while serving in their most recent presidency. To mitigate risk of indirect disclosure, the researcher will not include the date or description of the incidents or crises that may be discussed in the interview. In addition, college presidents are public figures and give interviews frequently that include information about their decisions.

You may refuse to answer any of the questions and you may take a break at any time during the study. You are free to stop your participation in this study at any time.

5) Are there any benefits to taking part in this study?

The benefit to you that might result from your participation in this study is the opportunity to shed light on how presidents evolve over time in office and reflect on your experiences and contributions to the higher education presidency.

The benefits to college presidency research that might result from this study are an increased understanding of the impact tenure has on decision-making processes for university presidents.

6) What are my other options?

You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. Should you decide to participate and later change your mind, you can do so at any time.

7) Will I receive payment for being in this study?

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

8) Can I be taken off the study?

The investigator or sub-investigator can decide to withdraw you from the study at any time. You could be taken off the study for reasons related solely to you (for example, not following study-related directions from the Investigator) or because the study is stopped.

9) How will my privacy be protected?

Your identity will be protected in this study by receiving a pseudonym and a key will be created and maintained linking each subject to their interview data without the use of any identifiable information. To mitigate risk of indirect disclosure, the researcher will not include the date or description of the incidents or crises that may be discussed in the interview. The George Washington University will not release any information about your research involvement without your written permission, unless required by law.

10) Problems or Questions

The Office of Human Research at The George Washington University (202-994-2715) can provide further information about your rights as a researcher participant. If you think you have been harmed in this study, you should report it to the Principal Investigator of the study. Further information regarding this study may be obtained from Dr. Susan Swayze (Principal Investigator) at (703) 969-8418 or Timothy M. Miller (Sub-Investigator) at (202) 438-0954.

\*Please keep a copy of this document for your records.

11) Informed Consent

Consent will be requested at the beginning of the interview and prior to any data gathering.

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

1. How would you describe your presidency?
2. How would you describe your philosophy or approach to decision-making?

Following these first two questions, the next set of questions will be asked about four different decision-making processes during their tenure. The presidents will be asked about a decision in their first year, early tenure, mid tenure, and final year and then follow the sequence of questions below to gather information about each of the processes.

3. What happened? Describe the situation, the decision-making process undertaken (who was involved, what criteria were considered/weighed, etc.), and the outcome. (p. 191)
4. What did you learn from it (for better or worse)? (p. 191)
5. In examining the decision in retrospect:
  - a. How did your past experience prepare you to address this strategic decision? (Commitment to Paradigm)
  - b. How prepared were you with the knowledge of university policies, procedures, resources, etc. to handle this strategic decision appropriately? (Task Knowledge)
  - c. Who did you consult in handling this situation and why were those people involved in determining the correct course of action? (Information Diversity)
  - d. How engaging and challenging was this strategic decision for you? (Task Interest)
  - e. How did your power and authority present itself in the incident and make it easier or more challenging to handle? (Power)

After the discussion of the four decision-making processes, more general questions will be asked:

6. Overall, how have you changed, during your last presidency? (p. 193)
7. How would you describe how your approach to decisions changed or adapted over time?
8. Were there times when you've been more open to learning than others? More closed? Explain. (p. 193)
9. In retrospect, how do you perceive each of these moments of strategic choice and would you have handled them differently if they had arisen at a different time in your presidency? - "For example, if the first decision you described had occurred in your last year in office, how would you have handled it the same or differently?"