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Beyond Automation: How AI is Enhancing Leadership in Higher Education

Adopting a Freudenfreude Mindset in Your Leadership Approach

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Abstract

Leadership in academia is often focused on traditional leadership theories and an all or none model. We suggest that there is a positive leadership style that incorporates several styles (Transformational, Adaptive, Servant, etc.) and can lead to a Freudenfreude Mindset. *Freudenfreude* means enjoying and celebrating the successes of others. An empathetic leadership style incorporating a Freudenfreude Mindset may help lead to a positive institution with individuals and leadership working together for shared successes and a healthy environment of satisfaction, support, and growth. This commentary provides a brief review of the literature surrounding *freudenfreude* principles and ways teams can utilize traditional leadership theories to embrace the Freudenfreude Mindset. In order to embrace it, educators and leaders need to apply introspection and self-reflection to examine the level of positivity they bring to themselves and those closest to them.

Keywords: Leadership, mindset, freudenfreude, positivity

Introduction

Experiencing joy and fulfillment within our lives can be connected to meaningful moments where that same joy and fulfillment can be felt when our close colleagues succeed. Through this set of thoughts and feelings, we access the Freudenfreude Mindset. *Freudenfreude* is defined as “finding pleasure in another person’s good fortune” and embodies positivity as a leadership style (Fraga, 2022; Cohen, 2015). This German word is inspired by the term “joy,” and has a German synonym of *mitfreude*. It is also linked to *mudita* which is Buddhist teaching of “finding joy in the happiness and success of others” (Mudita, 2005). *Schadenfreude* is a related term that has been more widely used in American culture, often associated with the smug feelings of satisfaction experienced when celebrities or villains fall from grace. *Schadenfreude* means to take “pleasure and/or joy derived from someone else’s suffering or misfortune” (Brown, 2021). Furthermore, the terms *freudenfreude* and *schadenfreude* are present in literature related to psychology and affective moods.

Brown surfaced the concept of *freudenfreude* as a subset of empathy where in sharing success, the empathetic response for shared joy is expected. If a negative or competitive response is

experienced instead, this may be detrimental to the relationship (Brown, 2021; Fraga, 2022). The Freudenfreude Mindset involves using empathy, building others up, and supporting one another. *Freudenfreude* aligns with various leadership styles and approaches. One leadership approach, positive leadership, is a compilation of many different philosophies, described within positive and organizational psychology literature that encompasses various leadership styles, including servant, transformational, authentic, ethical, and spiritual leadership styles (Blanch, 2016). It includes focusing on people’s strengths and potential, individualism and organizational needs, and human virtues (Blanch, 2016). TABLE 1 describes how various leadership philosophies are related to the Freudenfreude Mindset (Smith, 2005; Blanch, 2016; Heifetz, 2009; Fielder, 1967). Studies have shown positive leadership leads to enhanced well-being, satisfaction, and engagement, as well as improved performance of individuals, teams, and organizations (Kelloway, 2013; Russell, 2021). This article highlights the key points of the Freudenfreude Mindset, which like other mindset frameworks has a spectrum, in this case comparing *freudenfreude* on one end of the scale to *schadenfreude* on the other.

TABLE 1
Relationship Between Select Leadership Philosophies and Freudenfreude Mindset

Leadership Philosophies (definition)	Connection with Freudenfreude Mindset	Leadership Action Steps Across Leadership Philosophies and Freudenfreude Mindsets
Servant (providing service to others and enabling others to be positive in the organization) (Blanch, 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sense of community and engagement •Service to others based on performance of all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ensure team members engage in growth through shared decision-making •Treat team members with a holistic lens •Promote ways to ensure individuals and teams build trust with one another and are supported within the structures of the organization
Transformational (focusing on the future and guiding behaviors to achieve goals) (Blanch, 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Celebrates success of team members •Inspirational motivation for a shared vision •Individualized consideration for each team member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Engage individuals and teams with a state of idealized influence, ensuring they can behave and be in ways that integrate aspirational goals •Focus on transformation without judgment of prior behavior - centralizing more of where the organization is going in the future •Emphasize strategies to minimize perceived loss with change and highlight what will be gained and what will benefit the whole
Authentic (modeling positive behaviors through self-awareness and transparent actions) (Blanch, 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Leaders model positive behaviors and focus on their own values and those of the team and organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Develop self-awareness and self-regulation •Model how behaviors manifest across contexts •Develop shared positive and productive behaviors aligning with everyone’s identities to promote meaningful relationships, trust-building, and growth mindset

Leadership Philosophies (definition)	Connection with Freudenfreude Mindset	Leadership Action Steps Across Leadership Philosophies and Freudenfreude Mindsets
<p>Situational (considering the situation at hand in connection with the attributes of the team, the organization, and the task) (Fielder, 1967)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Strengths of team members are leveraged to help team progress •Nuances of the problem are highlighted to customize problem-solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Learn the strengths of your team members •Consider aligning your organization's structures (policies and procedures) with the strengths (and desired abilities, skills, and mindset) of the people in your organization •Engage in discussions and brainstorming that appreciates the nuance in the problem asking questions like, "What can we do differently in this specific case, given any differences?"
<p>Adaptive (considering the unfolding environmental needs impacting shared decision-making) (Heifetz, 2009)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges are seen as circumstances and not seen as being negative (or positive). They are simply something to be addressed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Engage in discussions with the team to discern when a change effort or challenge is either adaptive or technical and seek agreement •Reflect on when an adaptive change was approached as if it were a technical change and the accompanied challenges with the goal of minimizing future miscategorizations

Background

Mindsets encompass attitudes and the perspectives people take when thinking about an issue (Dweck, 2006). Gottfredson describes mindsets as a set of mental lenses that affect how we see and interpret the world and other people, and influence the decisions we make, including how we address challenges and opportunities (Gottfredson, 2020). Multiple mindset frameworks since have been studied in both the academic and popular literature, including prevention vs. promotion, scarcity vs. abundance, open vs. closed, and inward vs. outward (Gottfredson, 2020). These have been used to promote self-awareness, metacognition, and personal/professional leadership development.

Academic literature examining concepts related to Freudenfreude Mindset in leadership can be found in health professions, higher education, and business and organizational literature and practice (Townesley, 2023; Bamford, 2013). Research studies have demonstrated that positive psychology interventions are effective in the general population, including several randomized controlled trials (Seligman, 2005). Specifically in the health professions literature, a 2023 systematic review conducted by Townesley and colleagues demonstrated that interventions using positive psychology approaches hold promise for improving the well-being of healthcare workers (Townesley, 2023). These methods included mindfulness-based and gratitude-based strategies. Outcomes included reductions in stress, anxiety, and burnout, with improvements in job satisfaction and subjective well-being. Additionally, physical benefits, such as decreases in inflammatory biomarkers and cortisol were found, as were cognitive benefits such as increased working memory and

decreased distractibility. These methods and outcomes of positive leadership support the value of adopting the Freudenfreude Mindset.

Other professions, for example in nursing leadership, have also explored concepts aligning with the Freudenfreude Mindset, such as building up resilience and demonstrating caring behaviors through authentic leadership (a leadership style that seeks to understand, support, and include the values of team members) (Blanch, 2016). Caring leadership behaviors include demonstrating a hope-filled attitude, seeking to understand team member experiences, offering support, initiating action, leading with integrity, and supporting resilience and recovery (Koloroutis, 2004). Bamford and colleagues found that nurses who worked for managers leveraging authentic leadership reported greater engagement at work as well as increased mental resilience (Bamford, 2013). These findings support the connection between authentic leadership approaches with the Freudenfreude Mindset.

In organizational leadership, Norman and colleagues examined how leader positivity and transparency in a downsizing scenario impacted participants' level of trust in the leader and the leader's perceived effectiveness (Norman, 2010). The results support that both the level of transparency exhibited by the leader and the leader's level of positive psychological capacity each positively impacted both participants' rated trust and perceived effectiveness of their leaders. Positive psychological capacities and transparency constructs manipulated in this study have both been described and measured as "state-like" constructs. (Luthans, Avolio et al., 2007; Luthans, Youssef et al 2007). The state-like constructs can be developed more easily than traits, so another practical implication is that leaders can develop a higher level of positive psychological capacity and transparency, which in turn would result in a higher level of trust and perceived effectiveness in leaders (Luthans, Avolio et al., 2007; Luthans, Youssef et al., 2007). Norman and colleagues concluded the results of their study not only provided added support for the value of leaders being more transparent to buffer the negative effects of downsizing, but also offered evidence of the importance of leaders being positive in terms of their confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience in a downsizing context.

Furthermore, a study evaluating the relationship of positive leadership behaviors and employee well-being in nursing home employees in Eastern Canada found that positive leadership behaviors were associated with more positive affect, but not necessarily less negative affect (Kelloway, 2013). Positive leadership was measured by five items based on focus groups with staff in another health care facility who were asked to identify actions of leaders that resulted in the employee feeling "better" or "more positive" at work. Respondents were specifically asked to focus on behaviors that were common rather than exceptional "grand gestures." Five items emerged from this process. In the survey, each participant was asked to reflect on the past four months of work and to indicate how often their supervisor had (a) thanked them, (b) praised them for their job performance, (c) cheered them up, (d) gone out of his or her way to help them, and (e) complimented them. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale with higher scores indicating a higher frequency of the behavior. They concluded their work to be consistent with Fredrickson's work on positivity that suggests that increasing the ratio of positive to negative emotions, rather than eliminating negative emotions, is the key to enhancing well-being (Fredrickson, 2001).

The Freudenfreude Mindset can also impact the emotional well-being of both leaders and other team members. Chambliss and colleagues developed a screening tool to assess whether individual

differences in *freudenfreude* and *schadenfreude* vary with depression (Chambliss, 2012). The Freudenfreude and Schadenfreude Test (FAST) scale was developed, which includes 16 items that are self-reported regarding affective response to mutual success, mutual failure, one's own success, and others' success across four domains (relationship, academic, work, and physical appearance). The FAST scale was administered to approximately 250 undergraduate students and depression was assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory–II (Beck, 1996). Results indicated that *freudenfreude* scores were lower and *schadenfreude* scores were higher among mildly depressed students as compared to non-depressed students. According to the authors, lower *freudenfreude* and higher *schadenfreude* may compromise relationships, resulting in depression. Fraga suggests that *Freudenfreude* can “foster resilience, improve life satisfaction and help people cooperate during a conflict,” further demonstrating the value of leaders who embrace this mindset (Fraga, 2020).

Promoting Freudenfreude Mindset

The Freudenfreude Mindset can be accomplished through positivity, however, leaders must be careful to not become fake or overly toxic. In addition to *schadenfreude*, an antonym of a *freudenfreude* leadership mindset would be toxic positivity. Here difficult emotions are disregarded and replaced with a form of gaslighting¹ through use of encouraging and unrealistic optimistic statements (Berstein, 2021). This too would be similar to leading with a “Pollyanna”² attitude of always responding in a positive way, albeit often a naïve and overly positive way (Ackerman, 2018). A Freudenfreude Mindset requires a balance of optimism and positivity but should not be too one-sided which can lead to gaslighting or *schadenfreude*. Additionally, a positive action can feel good with a Freudenfreude Mindset whereas with *schadenfreude* it may feel good, but not be helpful.

Brown also described two new behavioral terms associated with *freudenfreude* - “shoy” and “bragitude” (Brown, 2021). *Shoy* is “intentionally sharing the joy of someone relating a success story by showing interest and asking follow-up questions.” *Bragitude* is “intentionally trying words of gratitude toward the listener following discussion of personal successes.” Translated to leverage a Freudenfreude Mindset, the goal is to accentuate the positive, build transparency and trust, create psychological safety, reduce stress, celebrate others' success, and create engagement along with increased productivity, job satisfaction, creativity, and retention of team members.

As leaders approach a new situation, they often use inquiry-based learning, asking questions to learn more about a given situation, which can be used to help illustrate the Freudenfreude Mindset. Problem-based inquiry follows a deficit-oriented model seeking to identify what is not working with a given situation or what the source of an issue was. Alternatively, appreciative inquiry looks at

¹ “A type of psychological abuse aimed at making victims seem or feel ‘crazy,’ creating a ‘surreal’ interpersonal environment ... [the term] is used to describe the mind-manipulating strategies of abusive people, in both politics and interpersonal relationships” (Sweet, 2019).

² For those who are unfamiliar with children's fiction from 1913, Pollyanna was an orphan who took her optimistic attitude everywhere in her disaster-strewn life through her invention of “the glad game” which involved finding silver linings in the most unlikely of scenarios. Pollyannaism, a term coined by Matlin and Stang in 1978, is a concept used to describe optimism that tips over into naïveté or refusing to accept the facts (Biron, 2014).

what is going well in a situation. Problem-based inquiry has the potential to alienate team-members or push them toward a defensive stance (prevention and scarcity mindsets). A solo focus on appreciative inquiry, however, can also be problematic as it has the potential to be seen as naïve or having one's head in the sand.

Leaders can promote the Freudenfreude Mindset individually, through leading by example, and globally as an organization from the top down. This means that the mindset needs to be embedded day-to-day with leaders directing it inwards on themselves, as a foundation for setting up teams for success. This can be done through mentorship and check-ins. Once the culture of shared success is set, mentors and teams can prepare how to “set the stage” from day to day with goals and interactions. Mentors help build trust with mentees and encourage them in positive ways. Teams can use strength-based principles to finish tasks, set clear expectations, focus on equity and inclusion, challenge one another, and celebrate team successes. Embracing the principles of vulnerability, safety, and open communication are vital for the mindset to be ingrained in team and organizational culture. When negativity or energy and emotional vampires come to fruition, accountability within the team for how to handle such issues needs to be brought forth and vigilantly enforced. Well-being and agreed upon goals should be also center stage in a Freudenfreude Mindset. Every team member matters, and their health and wellness need to be considered as work is done. Combined with individual mentor feedback and peer support, teams that focus on positive aspects of issues and support one another often function better (Moffett, 2016).

Conclusion

In order to embrace the Freudenfreude mindset, we call on educators and leaders at all levels to apply introspection and self-reflection to examine the level of positivity they are bringing to themselves and to those closest to them. Individuals struggling with *freudenfreude* for others may have a difficult time applying healthy positivity to themselves. Educators and leaders can start with available self-awareness tools that help them discover their preferences and strengths as a starting point to appreciate their own attributes and uniqueness. Once individuals can see their own value and worth, they may be better able to apply these tenets to their relationships with others. Being truly happy for the success of others amplifies positive feelings and can result in resilience in overcoming negative biases in the workplace and in our lives outside of work.

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Unlocking the Power of Authentic Leadership: Driving Innovation and Error Management

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Abstract

Delving into the realm of higher education, this study examines the intricate relationship between authentic leadership, organizational innovation, and error management. Utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), data was meticulously collected from faculty and staff members within Idaho's Higher Education Institutions. The primary objective was to scrutinize how authentic leadership influences both organizational innovation and error management, while also investigating the potential mediating effect of error management in the association between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness. The analysis unveiled noteworthy positive correlations between authentic leadership and both error management and organizational innovativeness. Interestingly, despite initial expectations, error management did not emerge as a mediator in the linkage between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness. These findings underscore the paramount importance of authentic leadership in nurturing organizational innovation and facilitating effective error management within the intricate landscape of higher education institutions. This research sheds light on the dynamic interplay between leadership authenticity, innovation, and error handling, offering valuable insights for educators, administrators, and researchers alike.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership, Organizational Management, Innovation, Higher Education, Educational Administration.

Introduction

Innovation stands as a cornerstone of progress, yet its implementation within the public sector often grapples with entrenched modes of operation, thwarting the pursuit of heightened efficiency and superior service delivery (Moussa et al., 2018). This challenge resonates within academia, where the sustainability of higher education institutions hinges upon their ability to foster innovation as a means of continual growth and adaptation (Izzati, 2018). However, recent trends suggest a concerning stagnation in the cultivation of innovative skills among academic staff globally, reflecting a broader reluctance to embracing innovative practices (Baharuddin et al., 2019). This reluctance is particularly pronounced in developed nations like the United States, where the

emergence of innovative behaviors among faculty members remains a formidable challenge (Ford et al., 2019).

Amidst these challenges, a critical spotlight falls upon leadership within educational institutions, where deficits in leadership acumen are increasingly recognized as impediments to innovation (Moussa et al., 2018; Valminen, 2019). Effective leadership, capable of fostering a culture of innovation while adeptly managing errors inherent in the process, emerges as a pivotal factor in propelling organizational innovativeness (Alblooshi et al., 2020; Fischer et al., 2018). Despite the acknowledged importance of leadership in driving innovation, scholarly attention to the underlying mechanisms linking leadership, error management, and organizational innovativeness remains limited, leaving notable gaps in the literature (Laguna et al., 2019).

Against this backdrop, this study aims to bridge these gaps by delving into the intricate interplay between authentic leadership, error management, and organizational innovativeness within higher education institutions. Authentic leadership, characterized by its emphasis on self-awareness, moral integrity, and transparent communication, emerges as a compelling avenue for nurturing organizational innovation and effective error management (Cha et al., 2019; O'Brien, 2016). With its capacity to engender objective decision-making and attentiveness to diverse perspectives, authentic leadership holds promise as a catalyst for aligning institutional practices with the evolving needs and expectations of stakeholders (Farnese et al., 2019). Furthermore, the study seeks to explore the mediating role of error management in the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness, an aspect that has received scant empirical scrutiny. By investigating these dynamics within the context of higher education, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms driving organizational innovation and inform strategies for fostering a culture of innovation within educational settings.

Conceptual Framework

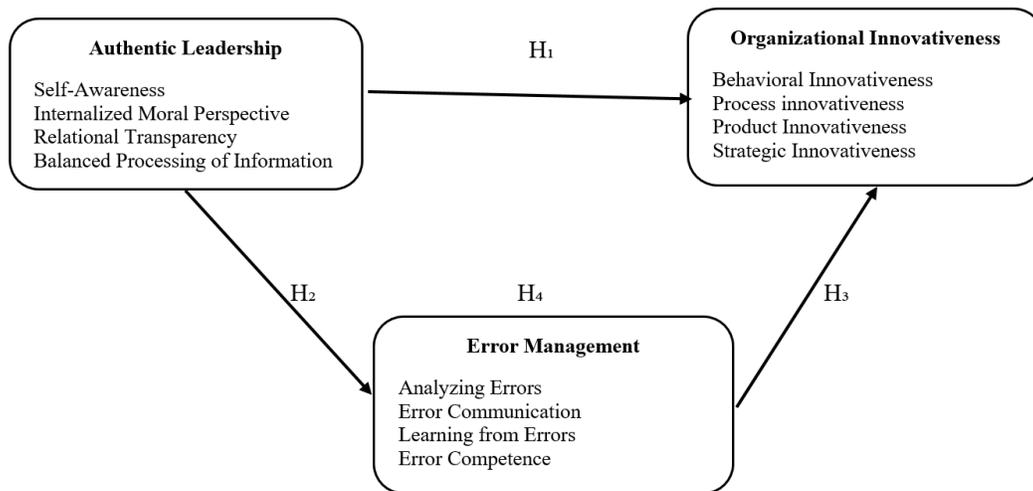
Authentic leadership is characterized by individuals who uphold high moral standards and self-regulation, achieved through self-reflection, awareness, and leadership development (Mukhwana, 2021). This leadership style involves aligning internal standards with empowering followers to foster authentic relationships (Swain et al., 2018). Scholars emphasize four key components of authentic leadership: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing (Malloy & Kavussanu, 2020).

Leadership, particularly authentic leadership, is associated with framing errors as learning opportunities rather than concealable failures (Deng et al., 2022; Dimitrova et al., 2017). Error management, facilitated by leaders' behavior and attitudes, is pivotal in mitigating the negative impact of errors and fostering a culture of learning (Farnese et al., 2019; Maurer et al., 2017). Organizations with an error management culture encourage open communication about errors, ultimately promoting organizational innovativeness (Cheng et al., 2019; Ye et al., 2018). Error management theory posits that coping with errors effectively contributes to organizational learning and innovativeness (Love et al., 2018). It suggests that errors should be addressed promptly to control negative consequences and foster organizational resilience (Couris, 2020; Zhang et al., 2018). Serendipity theory further underscores the role of error management in

organizational innovativeness, highlighting the importance of learning from unanticipated information (Reviglio, 2019).

Building upon existing theories, this study proposes a conceptual framework (see Figure 1) wherein error management acts as a mediator between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness. Despite the theoretical groundwork, empirical exploration of this mediation pathway remains limited, thus underscoring the need for the investigation presented in this study.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



A conceptual model that empirically examines the connections between authentic leadership's impact on organizational innovativeness is warranted. By scrutinizing the role of error management in the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness, we aim to deepen our understanding of how authentic leadership fosters organizational innovativeness by fostering an environment conducive to learning from mistakes. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formulated based on the conceptual model:

- H₁: There is a significant relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness.
- H₂: There is a significant relationship between authentic leadership and error management.
- H₃: There is a significant relationship between error management and organizational innovativeness.
- H₄: Error management mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness.

Literature Review

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership, rooted in ancient philosophical concepts, emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and moral integrity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). It involves leaders

being true to themselves while fostering authentic relationships with followers (Swain et al., 2018). Several researchers (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Malloy & Kavussanu 2020) argued that authentic leadership is viewed as a multidimensional construct with four key components: self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing. Self-awareness, the first component of authentic leadership, entails understanding one's values, emotions, strengths, and weaknesses (Miao et al., 2018). This awareness is crucial for emotional intelligence and adaptive decision-making (Saddiqui et al., 2018). Internalized moral perspective, the second component, involves aligning one's actions with personal values and ethical standards (Iszatt-White et al., 2019). Relational transparency, the third component, involves honest and open communication to reflect one's true self to others (Oh et al., 2018). Transparency fosters trust and understanding between leaders and followers (Jiang & Men, 2017). The fourth component, balanced processing of information, requires leaders to objectively analyze data and consider diverse perspectives before making decisions (Feng et al., 2018). This balanced approach enhances fairness and inclusivity in decision-making processes (Ilies et al., 2013). Overall, authentic leadership encompasses self-awareness, moral integrity, transparent communication, and balanced decision-making, contributing to effective leadership in various organizational contexts.

Organizational Innovativeness

Organizational innovativeness encompasses an organization's propensity to adopt novel ideas and implement changes, fostering creativity and adaptability (Çaglıyan et al., 2021). It involves behavioral, strategic, product, and process innovativeness, each contributing to organizational growth and competitiveness (Ghosh & Srivastava, 2021; Wang & Ahmed, 2004). Behavioral innovativeness highlights individuals' readiness to share knowledge and engage in problem-solving, crucial for collective innovation in higher education (Aboobaker & KA, 2021). Strategic innovativeness enables organizations to set future directions and develop resources to pursue them (Yousaf et al., 2021). Product innovation involves introducing or upgrading products to meet changing needs and preferences (Munywoki, 2016). Process innovativeness refers to the institution's ability to introduce new production and delivery methods, enhancing efficiency and customer value (Anning-Dorson et al., 2019). In higher education, organizational innovativeness is essential for promoting technological advancements and fostering societal and economic growth (Imhanrenialena & Sinclair, 2019). However, there remains a need for further research to enhance our understanding and conceptualization of innovation in higher education.

Authentic Leadership and Organizational Innovativeness

Authentic leadership plays a crucial role in fostering organizational innovativeness by creating supportive environments for innovation (Jia et al., 2018; Yamak & Eyupoglu, 2021). Studies suggest that authentic leadership directly impacts the climate of innovation and encourages behaviors conducive to innovativeness (Shanker et al., 2017). Authentic leaders, characterized by transparency, reliability, and integrity, contribute directly to organizational innovativeness (Edú-Valsania et al., 2016; Khalili, 2017). They advocate for teams, support innovation projects, and demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity, fostering a sense of purpose and optimism conducive to innovation (Storberg-Walker & Gardiner, 2017; Todt et al., 2018). Additionally, authentic leadership promotes trust and employee identity, enhancing creativity and innovativeness within organizations (Liu et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2017).

Error Management

Error management is essential in organizational settings to address errors effectively and prevent negative outcomes (Javed et al., 2020). It involves a shared set of norms and practices to identify, communicate, learn from, and handle errors (Guchait et al., 2016). Error analysis helps understand the reasons behind errors, facilitating prevention and improvement. Learning from errors involves reflection and deliberate efforts to develop new skills and competencies (Rauter et al., 2018). Error competence enables immediate recovery from errors, reducing their impact (Seckler et al., 2021). Effective error communication fosters knowledge sharing and the implementation of error management strategies (Ghezeljeh et al., 2021). In higher education, promoting a culture of error management encourages communication, collaboration, and proactive error resolution among faculty and staff (Farnese et al., 2022).

Methods

Research Design

The inquiry was divided into four (4) distinct sections. The first section provided demographic data such as gender and working experience. The second section covered all four dimensions of the Authentic Leadership Style scale (i.e., self-awareness, relational transparency, internal moral perspective, and balanced processing) adopted by Walumbwa et al. (2008). This scale was found to be valid and reliable, having Cronbach's alpha of 0.827, by researchers like Zeb et al. (2020). The third section entails the Error Management questionnaire measured using the 16-item measure developed by Van Dyck et al. (2005) and utilized by Guchait et al. (2016). The fourth section comprises four key organizational innovativeness indicators derived from Wang and Ahmed (2004): behavioral, process, strategic, and product innovativeness.

Data Collection

This study is advertised by emailing graduate school deans and inviting them to share the study invite on academic and non-academic listservs. Permission to conduct this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before recruiting participants. Participants included academic (i.e., professors and instructors) and non-academic staff (i.e., administrative assistants). A total sample size of 150 from 163 respondents comprising academic and non-academic staff were recruited for the study.

Data Analysis

Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the direct relationships between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness, authentic leadership and error management, as well as error management and organizational innovativeness. The PLS-SEM was also used to analyze the mediating role of error management on the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness. In structural equation modeling (SEM), construct validity assesses the accuracy of the measurement model in reflecting the measured construct (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Factor loadings indicate the strength of association between

latent constructs and observed indicators, with values above 0.5 considered indicative of construct validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Model fit indices such as construct validity, convergent validity, reliability statistics, discriminant validity, and also multicollinearity statistics were examined before direct and indirect (mediating) relationships among variables were tested. Smart PLS 4 statistical software was used to conduct PLS-SEM to test the direct and indirect relationships between authentic leadership, error management, and organizational innovativeness.

Out of 16 items for authentic leadership, 13 met the criteria for construct validity, while for error management, 11 out of 16 items met the criteria. For organizational innovativeness, 15 out of 21 items met the criteria for construct validity. Convergent validity, assessed through average variance extracted (AVE), was achieved for all constructs, with AVE values exceeding 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019; Thakkar, 2020). Reliability measures internal consistency and was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Vaske et al., 2017). Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.9 indicate strong internal consistency, as observed in this study. Similarly, composite reliability values exceeding 0.9 indicate strong internal consistency for each construct, namely authentic leadership, error management, and organizational innovativeness (Lai, 2021).

Results

This section presents the findings from structural equation modeling conducted using SmartPLS 4 software. Validity and model fit were assessed through factors such as construct validity (based on factor loadings, see Appendix), convergent validity (using Average Variance Extracted), reliability statistics, discriminant validity (assessed through HTMT and Fornell-Larcker criterion), multicollinearity statistics (examined using Variance Inflation Factor), and R-Square statistics. Direct and indirect effects among the variables (authentic leadership, error management, and organizational innovativeness) were analyzed to evaluate the proposed hypotheses.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, race, and educational level.

Table 1

Demographic Data of Respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	31	20.7
	Female	110	73.3
	Prefer not to answer	3	2.0
	Non-binary/third gender	6	4.0
	Total	150	100
Race	Caucasian/White	131	87.3
	Native American/American Indian	3	2.0
	African American	5	3.3
	Hispanic/Latino	5	3.3

	Multiracial	3	2.0
	Asian/Pacific Islander	3	2.0
	Total	150	100
Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	51	34
	Master's Degree	62	41.3
	Doctorate/PhD	37	24.7
	Total	150	100

The majority of respondents were female (73.3%), with males comprising 20.7% of the sample. In terms of race, most respondents were Caucasian/white (87.3%), with smaller percentages identifying as African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander (3.3% each), and native American/American Indian and multiracial (2% each). Regarding educational attainment, the majority held a Master's degree (41.3%), followed by bachelor's degree holders (34%) and those with a doctorate/PhD (24.7%).

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity evaluates the extent to which measures of different constructs are distinct from each other (Rasoolimanesh, 2022). In structural equation modeling (SEM), heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) and the Fornell-Larcker criterion are commonly used to assess discriminant validity. HTMT measures the correlation between constructs and their respective indicators compared to indicators of other constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). An HTMT ratio below 0.85 indicates acceptable discriminant validity, suggesting that constructs are sufficiently distinct (Hair et al., 2019). Conversely, an HTMT ratio above 0.85 may indicate potential issues with discriminant validity, suggesting high correlation between constructs (Hair et al., 2019). In our analysis (Table 2), the HTMT ratio was below 0.85, indicating that discriminant validity was likely achieved.

Table 2

Discriminant Validity Using HTMT Ratio

	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)
Error Management ↔ Authentic Leadership	0.790
Organizational Innovativeness ↔ Authentic Leadership	0.663
Organizational Innovativeness ↔ Error Management	0.563

The Fornell-Larcker criterion evaluates discriminant validity by comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with the correlations between constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). Discriminant validity is supported if the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than the correlation between that construct and any other construct (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). In our study (Table 3), discriminant validity was demonstrated as the square root of the AVE for each variable exceeded the correlations between constructs, indicating distinctiveness between constructs.

Table 3*Discriminant Validity Using Fornell Lacker Criterion*

	Authentic Leadership	Error Management	Organizational Innovativeness
Authentic Leadership	0.753		
Error Management	0.764	0.725	
Organizational Innovativeness	0.695	0.575	0.735

Multicollinearity Using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Multicollinearity occurs when predictor variables are highly correlated, complicating the interpretation of their individual effects (Shrestha, 2020). The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is commonly used to detect multicollinearity, with a VIF value exceeding 10 indicating significant multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). In our analysis, the VIF values of valid items used in structural equation modeling were all below 10, indicating no significant multicollinearity.

Squared Multiple Correlations

In Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the R-square measures the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent constructs in the model. The adjusted R-square considers the number of independent variables in the model. Our results indicate that authentic leadership among faculty and staff explains 58.4% of the variance in error management and 48.8% of the variance in organizational innovativeness.

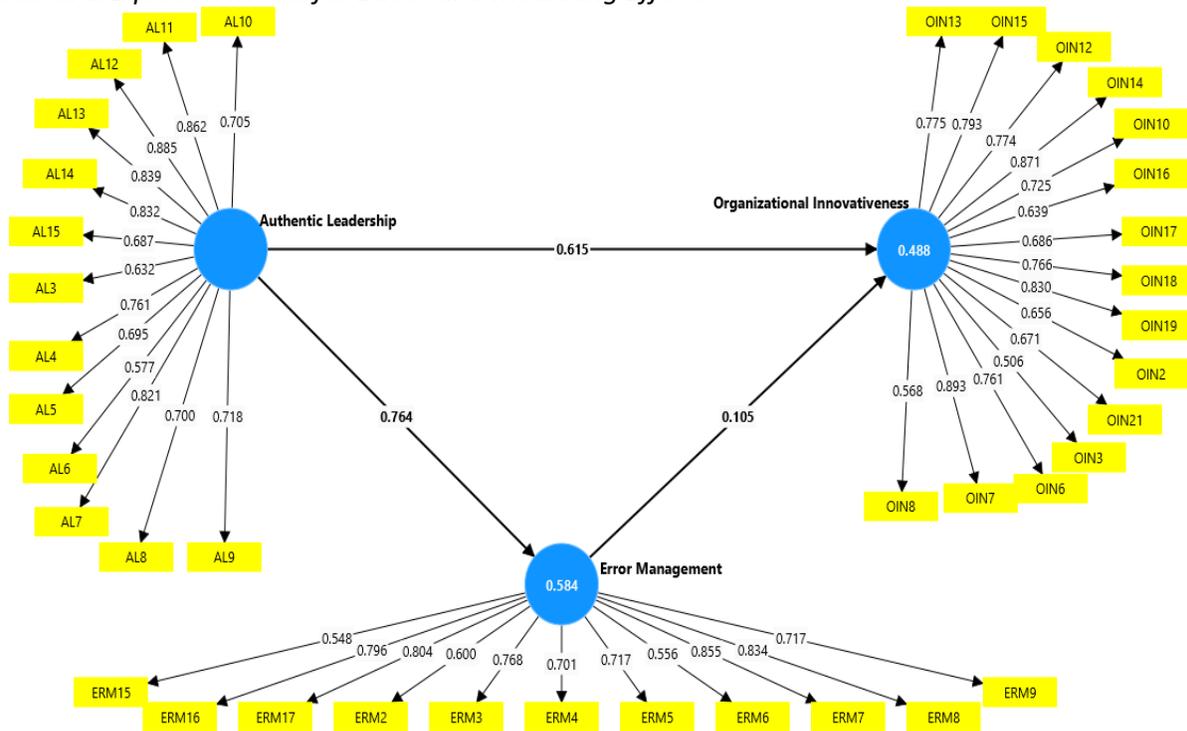
The analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness among faculty staff ($B=0.615$, $p<0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 1 (Table 4). Similarly, a significant positive association exists between authentic leadership and error management among faculty staff ($B=0.764$, $p<0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 2.

Table 4*Direct and Mediating Relationships*

Hypotheses	B-value	t- statistics	p-values	Decision
H1: Authentic Leadership→ Organizational Innovativeness	0.615	8.375	0.000	Supported
H2: Authentic Leadership→ Error Management	0.764	22.822	0.000	Supported
H3: Error Management→ Organizational Innovativeness	0.105	1.138	0.255	Not supported
H4: Authentic Leadership→ Error Management→ Organizational Innovativeness	0.081	1.125	0.261	Not supported

However, a non-significant positive relationship is found between error management and organizational innovativeness among faculty and staff ($B=0.105$, $p>0.05$), indicating that error management does not contribute to organizational innovativeness, contrary to Hypothesis 3. Furthermore, error management does not mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness among faculty and staff ($B=0.018$, $p>0.05$), suggesting that error management does not explain the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness. Figure 2 is the overall SEM analysis that displays the direct and mediating effects among variables.

Figure 2
Structural Equation Model for Direct and Mediating Effects



Discussion

This study sheds light on the underlying psychological mechanisms linking authentic leadership and error management with organizational innovativeness. The challenges of fostering innovation, prevalent in both the public sector and academia, underscore the significance of understanding the dynamics of leadership and error management in driving organizational innovation (Izzati, 2018; Moussa et al., 2018). Innovative behaviors among staff are crucial for organizational effectiveness and efficiency, yet they are often hindered by leadership deficits and a reluctance to acknowledge and learn from errors (Farnese et al., 2019; Ford et al., 2019).

Leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering innovation and error management within organizations, with authentic leadership emerging as a key determinant of innovativeness (Alblooshi et al., 2020). The findings highlight the importance of leadership styles that support innovation and effective error management, as innovation inherently involves the risk of errors (Fischer et al., 2018).

Institutions, therefore, need to cultivate a leadership culture that promotes both innovation and error management to thrive in today's rapidly evolving landscape (Oliveira et al., 2022)

Our study contributes to the existing literature by empirically demonstrating the positive relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness, consistent with previous findings (Laguna et al., 2019). Similarly, the significant association between authentic leadership and error management aligns with prior research, emphasizing the role of leadership in shaping error management practices (Cheng et al., 2019; Fischer et al., 2018).

However, the non-significant relationship between error management and organizational innovativeness in our study contradicts some previous findings. While error management is considered conducive to innovation in certain contexts (Fischer et al., 2018), our results suggest a more nuanced relationship that warrants further investigation. Similarly, the lack of mediation effect of error management between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness deviates from previous studies, highlighting the mediating role of error management in similar contexts (Li & Zhang, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2022). Ultimately, our study underscores the importance of authentic leadership and effective error management in fostering organizational innovativeness. While our findings provide valuable insights, further research is needed to explore the complexities of these relationships and their implications for organizational practices and outcomes.

Limitations

In conducting this study, several limitations were encountered. Firstly, the participant pool was confined to faculty and staff members from higher education institutions in Idaho, potentially restricting the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Secondly, the study relied on data collected at a single time point, which may have overlooked temporal changes in authentic leadership, error management, and organizational innovativeness. Thirdly, self-reported data introduced the possibility of biases such as social desirability or recall bias, potentially impacting the reliability of responses. Fourthly, the findings are contextualized within the specific landscape of Idaho's higher education, potentially overlooking variations in other educational systems or cultural contexts. Lastly, while efforts were made to ensure measurement validity, capturing the complexity of constructs like authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness remains a challenge.

Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore the significant influence of authentic leadership on both organizational innovation and employees' error management. It was observed that faculty members exposed to authentic leadership tend to exhibit more innovative behavior and effectively address errors. However, while authentic leadership demonstrated a substantial positive association with error management, it did not directly lead to increased organizational innovation among faculty staff. This finding challenges the widely held assumption that error management inevitably leads to enhanced organizational innovation. Furthermore, the absence of mediation suggests that error management does not fully explain the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovation. These results highlight the crucial role of authentic

leadership in fostering organizational innovation and promoting effective error management among faculty members.

By revealing the mediating role of error management in the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness, this study provides valuable insights for higher education institutions. It suggests avenues for enhancing error management practices and mitigating negative repercussions, ultimately contributing to the improvement of institutional quality, transparency, and ethical regulation of employee behavior, which in turn impacts student experiences. Considering the significant positive relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness among faculty and staff, it is recommended that institutions focus on cultivating authentic leadership qualities in faculty leaders through targeted programs, mentorship initiatives, and the promotion of a culture centered on authenticity, transparency, and trust. Active engagement with faculty members, listening to their concerns, providing support, and empowering them to create an innovative environment are crucial. Additionally, promoting authentic leadership and error management practices among faculty and staff is essential for fostering a learning culture that encourages error identification, effective communication, problem-solving, and resilience building. Implementing feedback mechanisms and supportive processes can further enhance organizational performance and effectiveness.

Given the non-significant positive relationship between error management and organizational innovativeness among faculty and staff, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing initiatives across departments and disciplines is recommended. Collaboration fosters diverse perspectives and encourages interdisciplinary teamwork, thereby promoting innovation, problem-solving, and creativity. Recognizing that error management does not mediate the relationship between authentic leadership and organizational innovativeness, investing in continuous learning and professional development opportunities for faculty and staff through training programs, workshops, conferences, and resources is crucial. Empowering faculty members with innovative skills will enable them to adapt to change and contribute positively to the organization's success.

Recommendations

This study has illuminated the intricate dynamics between authentic leadership, error management, and organizational innovativeness in higher education institutions, paving the way for future research directions. Firstly, longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights by tracking the evolution of leadership dynamics and innovation over time, providing a comprehensive understanding of their interaction within educational contexts. Secondly, qualitative methods could capture nuanced perspectives and contextual nuances that quantitative data might miss, enriching our understanding of leadership, error management, and innovation. Thirdly, comparative investigations across different institutions or cultural contexts could reveal variations in these dynamics, enhancing our understanding of organizational effectiveness and innovation in higher education. Lastly, cross-cultural studies could explore cultural influences on leadership and innovation, leading to the development of culturally sensitive strategies for fostering innovation within diverse educational settings.

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Appendix Construct Validity for Variables

		Valid Items	Factor Loadings
	AL3 <- Authentic Leadership	Says exactly what he or she means	0.632
	AL4 <- Authentic Leadership	Admits mistakes when they are made	0.761
	AL5 <- Authentic Leadership	Demonstrates beliefs that are consistent with actions	0.695
	AL6 <- Authentic Leadership	Makes decisions set on his or her core beliefs	0.577
	AL7 <- Authentic Leadership	Solicits opinions that challenge his or her deeply held positions	0.821
	AL8 <- Authentic Leadership	Listens carefully to diverse points of view before coming to conclusions	0.700
	AL9 <- Authentic Leadership	Encourages everyone to speak their mind	0.718
Authentic Leadership	AL10 <- Authentic Leadership	Tells you the hard truth	0.705
	AL11 <- Authentic Leadership	Displays emotions exactly in line with feelings	0.862
	AL12 <- Authentic Leadership	Asks you to take positions that support your core values	0.885

	AL13 <- Authentic Leadership	Analyses relevant data before coming to a decision	0.839
	AL14 <- Authentic Leadership	Makes challenging decisions based on high standards of ethical conduct	0.832
	AL15 <- Authentic Leadership	Knows when it is time to re-evaluate his or her positions on relevant issues	0.687
Error Management	ERM2 <- Error Management	After an error has happened, it is examined thoroughly.	0.600
	ERM3 <- Error Management	If something goes wrong, people take the time to think it through.	0.768
	ERM4 <- Error Management	After making a mistake, people try to examine what caused it.	0.701
	ERM5 <- Error Management	In this institution, people think a lot about how an error could have been avoided	0.717
	ERM6 <- Error Management	For us, errors are very functional for improving the job process.	0.556
	ERM7 <- Error Management	An error provides essential information for the continuation of the work.	0.855
	ERM8 <- Error Management	Our errors point us to what we can ameliorate.	0.834
	ERM9 <- Error Management	When mastering a job, people can learn a lot from their mistakes.	0.717
	ERM15 <- Error Management	If people are incapable of continuing their work after an error, they can depend on others.	0.548
	ERM16 <- Error Management	When people make an error, they can ask others for advice on how to continue.	0.796
	ERM17 <- Error Management	When someone makes an error, the person shares it with others so that they do not make the same mistake.	0.804
	OIN2 <- Organizational Innovativeness	In our institution, we encourage individuals who do things differently.	0.656
	OIN3 <- Organizational Innovativeness	Senior executives frequently seek unusual, novel solutions to problems.	0.506
	OIN6 <- Organizational Innovativeness	Management actively reacts to the adoption of "new ways" of doing things by our leading competitors	0.761
	OIN7 <- Organizational Innovativeness	Our institution changes or ameliorates processes at an enormous speed compared to competitors.	0.893
	OIN8 <- Organizational Innovativeness	We are uninterruptedly improving our business processes.	0.568

	OIN10 <- Organizational Innovativeness	Our institution engages in the service process to enhance delivery efficiency.	0.725
Organizational Innovativeness	OIN12 <- Organizational Innovativeness	In new product or service introductions, our institution often precedes other similar organizations	0.774
	OIN13 <- Organizational Innovativeness	Our new products or services are often perceived as very novel by customers	0.775
	OIN14 <- Organizational Innovativeness	Our institution is known for quality improvements	0.871
	OIN15 <- Organizational Innovativeness	Our institution comes up with new services to help deliver better value.	0.793
	OIN16 <- Organizational Innovativeness	In terms of service, our organization is capable of breathing new life into existing products to meet demands	0.639
	OIN17 <- Organizational Innovativeness	Our institution's product or service development resources are insufficient to handle the growing need for new products or services.	0.686
	OIN18 <- Organizational Innovativeness	When we view new ways of doing things, we are late at adopting them.	0.766
	OIN19 <- Organizational Innovativeness	In comparison with our competitors, we are late in the adoption of technological innovations.	0.830
	OIN21 <- Organizational Innovativeness	Our institution creates resource capacity to move in those directions	0.671

LEAD: Enhancing Processes for Selecting Departmental Leaders

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Abstract

This article describes the development, implementation, and evaluation of LEAD, an intervention focusing on enhancing the processes and procedures for selection of leadership positions within the School of Medicine (SOM) at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). LEAD entailed developing and implementing a leadership selection toolkit comprising comprehensive resources for transparent search processes and procedures for internal, departmental leadership positions, as well as accountability measures to facilitate promising practices and track outcomes. LEAD increased utilization of transparent systemic processes for leadership selection and tracking of sustainable accountability structures across 28 departments, accompanied by a corresponding increase in leadership diversity. The toolkit is publicly accessible to facilitate application across academic medicine and other disciplines.

Keywords: search processes; leadership; organizational change; promising practices

Introduction

Excellence in discovery, education, and clinical care, as well as the fiscal health of an academic organization, is enhanced by diversity (Gomez & Bernet, 2019; Hunt et al., 2015). On a tangible level, lack of diversity in academic leadership contributes to inequities in salary, resource allocation, and visibility for women and underrepresented minorities (URMs)¹, perpetuating the bias in the leadership pathway. Faculty leaders serve as important role models, and lack of leadership

¹ At UCSF our working definition of an underrepresented minority (URM) is someone whose racial or ethnic makeup is from one of the following:

African American / Black

Asian: Filipino, Hmong, or Vietnamese

Hispanic / Latinx

Native American / Alaskan Native

Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander

Two or more races, when one or more are from the preceding racial and ethnic categories in this list

opportunities has been found to be a primary reason for early-career faculty departure (O’Meara et al., 2014). Despite evidence supporting the benefits of diversity, leadership in higher education more broadly remains disproportionately composed of males and white individuals (Espinosa et al., 2019; Pritchard et al., 2020). This has also been borne out at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF): For example, at the outset of the LEAD project in 2020, women comprised over 50% of UCSF’s faculty. However, this parity was not reflected in leadership positions.

Conceptual Background

Intersectional imbalance in leadership roles in higher education is partially attributable to larger systemic processes, including a lack of both transparency and concrete processes for selection of faculty for internal leadership positions, and perceptions of bias that have been shown to thrive under such practices (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016; van den Brink et al., 2010). Inequities persist in part because individuals tend to favor those who are like them (Freeman & Huang, 2014; Page, 2007). Systemic bias, which is often unconscious, has been identified as the greatest barrier to achieving diversity and equity in STEM (National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, & Institute of Medicine, 2007).

Such biases tend to map onto existing social hierarchies, and favor men, whites, youth, heterosexuals, and the physically able (Nosek et al., 2009). As such, women and URM face both unconscious and explicit bias in evaluation and hiring (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012; Witteman et al., 2019), and perceive fewer opportunities for leadership and internal advancement (Hewlett & Hidden Brain, 2008; Pololi et al., 2012), with individuals with two or more subordinated identities (e.g., gender, LGBTQ status, race, disability) potentially subject to “double discrimination” (NPR, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, & Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2017).

The present intervention’s focus on resources for transparent search processes and procedures for the selection of department leaders draws from research theory and evidence suggesting that transparency and bias in departmental leadership positions are leverage points for enhancement of climate and retention for all faculty (Van den Brink et al., 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Whittaker et al., 2015). The rationale underlying the identification of these target areas and the proposed solutions are informed by socio-ecological theories of organizational change, which broadly posit that institutional transformation is rooted in systems change on multiple levels of an organization (Carr et al., 2016; McLeroy et al.).

There are several useful theoretical lenses for viewing the conceptualization of these issues and potential solutions. Carr et al. (2016) adapted Bronfenbrenner’s (M. Bronfenbrenner, 1994) ecological systems theory of human development for gender equity in academic medicine, stressing that successful efforts to spur sustainable changes in equity require intervention across multiple levels of the socio-ecological environment (individual, interpersonal, institutional, academic community, and policy) while observing that many institutions target equity at just one or two levels.

An important feature of ecological systems theories is dynamic interaction between and across levels of the system: What is happening at each level feeds into, impacts, and is influenced by what happens on all other levels, and subsequently affects the functioning of individuals and groups

within the system (M. Bronfenbrenner, 1994; U. Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, if the intervention centered only on the individual level, with raising awareness of unconscious bias, but the policy of department chairs appointing internal leadership positions without transparency continued, it is unlikely that systemic change would occur. As such, to increase the likelihood of sustained systemic change, an institution must target multiple levels of the socio-ecological environment by both implementing structures and processes and targeting individual and interpersonal factors.

Policy, Academic Community, and Institutional Levels

Unconscious bias thrives in the absence of systemic processes, transparency, and accountability

Evidence suggests that unconscious biases play a significant role in perpetuating leadership disparities at institutions with environments that have historically been centered on non-URM men, with systemic inequity built into these support networks (Konrad et al., 2010; Morley, 2013; Pololi et al., 2012; Whittaker et al., 2015). When such environments are also characterized by informal, opaque leadership search and advancement processes, with little or no accountability structure or transparency in organizational decision-making (e.g., unclear criteria and confidential evaluations, or no formal evaluation), this exacerbates systemic barriers in the institution such as gender norms and unconscious bias (Beddoes & Pawley, 2014; van den Brink et al., 2010), ultimately leading to lower representation of diverse individuals in leadership (Morley, 2013; van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). Lack of leadership opportunities and perception of exclusion due to organizational culture are often cited as reasons for disengagement from an institution.

Seminal social science literature, as well as recent research, support instituting specific, measurable, and objective indicators and processes for leadership searches, as detailed above, as a primary strategy for decreasing bias (Biernat & Manis, 1994; Martell & Guzzo, 1991; Moscatelli et al., 2020; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005). A key aspect is instituting accountability measures for those with decision-making power over leadership roles in the form of systemic data collection and accessibility of data (Acosta et al., 2020; Bickel et al., 2002). Van den Brink and colleagues (Marieke van den Brink et al., 2010, p. 1461) assert, "Institutions can be said to be transparent when they release information that is relevant to holding them accountable." Overall, imposing accountability via implementation of new systematic procedures in concert with training at the individual and interpersonal levels increases the likelihood that process and diversity outcomes will improve (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005); moreover, having transparent and accessible data reflecting individual and institutional adherence to and performance on these measures can increase adherence to those new procedures (Bensimon, 2004).

Individual and interpersonal levels

Research based on implementation and effective elements of unconscious bias training

Structural initiatives are crucial factors in spurring meaningful change across the institutional and policy levels of an organization (Kang & Kaplan, 2019). Initiatives fostering awareness of and strategies for reduction of unconscious bias have been shown to be effective for reducing barriers to leadership and advancement for subordinated groups in STEMM (Carnes et al., 2015) and can be a crucial adjunctive to programming on policy and institutional levels. Unconscious bias awareness in and of itself is unlikely to result in systems change (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018). However, research

suggests that consistent with a systems approach, pairing tools to actively counter individual bias with broader institutional strategies can enhance buy-in and commitment to change, alter attitudes and behaviors, and result in institutional transformation (Carnes et al., 2015; Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; National Academy of Sciences et al., 2007; National Institutes of Health . Office of Research on Women's, 2008; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012).

Evidence suggests three major components for effective bias education: 1. Bias literacy, ensuring that all are aware of the concept and consequences of unconscious biases; 2. Awareness of one's own unconscious biases; and 3. Actionable tools and resources to actively combat bias (Staats et al., 2017). These components help individuals to reinterpret scenarios, enhance perspective taking and communication skills, and counter stereotypes. As such, fostering awareness of unconscious bias for those with decision-making roles in departmental leadership searches is an important component of an intervention that aims for sustainable compositional and process change on all levels of the UCSF system.

The Present Study

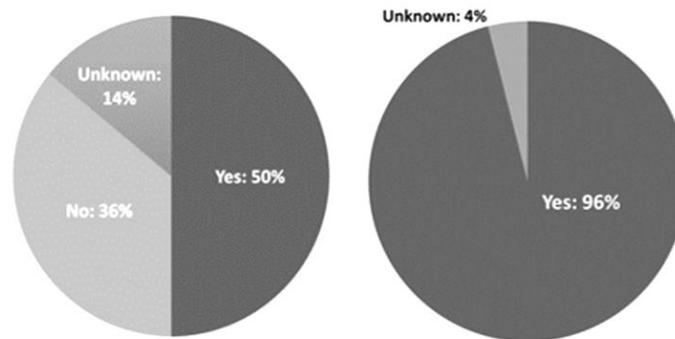
LEAD focuses on the implementation of systemic processes and increasing accountability measures for internal leadership positions in the UCSF School of Medicine (SOM).

When this project was conceived in 2020, UCSF had already taken important steps in laying the groundwork for this pilot project drawing from a body of efforts with the aim of increasing academic diversity, equity, and inclusion, including but not limited to the establishment of the UCSF Office of Diversity and Outreach, the SOM Differences Matter Initiative, the Faculty Equity Advisor (FEA) program, and the establishment of Department Diversity Leaders. These efforts and others have aimed to institutionalize interventions in external hiring, climate, and retention.

In 2017, in accordance with UC best practices, UCSF adopted new guidelines for faculty searches, centering on appointment of Faculty Equity Advisors (FEAs), senior faculty members who provide information and advice about practices for advancing excellence, equity and diversity in faculty recruitment at UCSF. The FEAs provide a model and a resource to leverage in transforming the internal leadership selection landscape. (Two of the authors have led the development and oversight of the faculty equity advisor program and an additional author serves in the role of faculty equity advisor.)

Importantly, while external faculty searches followed established procedures and involved faculty equity advisors, internal leadership selection remained largely informal. In 2019, before the LEAD project, most internal departmental leadership positions were filled based on chair preference with only 50% of departments having formal search processes for such positions (Figure 1a-1b). While search processes varied depending on the position (e.g., Vice-Chair, Division/Section Chief, and Residency/Fellowship Director), from 50% to 83% of each of these paid leadership positions were appointed by the Chair without an open call or search. It became clear that, while UCSF had made strides in reducing bias and increasing inclusivity in external searches, these same steps had not been applied to internal departmental searches. As such, we designed the LEAD intervention to increase transparent processes and procedures for internal leadership selection in the UCSF SOM, including 28 departments and more than 3000 full-time faculty members.

Figures 1a and 1b



Note:

Figure 1a. Percent of the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine Departments reporting open call/search for Departmental Leadership Positions, 2019. Source: LEAD Project
Figure 1b. Percent of University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine Departments reporting open call/search for Departmental Leadership Positions, 2021.
Source: UCSF School of Medicine Dean's Office

Leadership at UCSF

To clarify the nature of leadership disparities at UCSF, several quantitative and qualitative data sources, including demographic analyses of leadership; internal leadership practices; faculty climate survey data; and data gathered in small focus groups with senior women faculty spanning the basic sciences, social and behavioral sciences, and clinical departments, were synthesized. Paid leadership positions were as follows: Dean, Vice Dean, Associate Dean, Department Chair, Organizational Research Unit Director, Vice Chair, Division Chief, and Residency Director. While some paid leadership positions are typically externally searched (e.g., Dean, Chair) most are not, and those positions are the focus of the LEAD project.

According to 2019 baseline data, just 50% of SOM departments had formal search processes and job descriptions for leadership positions, and most paid leadership positions were appointed by the Department Chair. At that time, women held just over one third of leadership positions (e.g., Division Chief, Vice Chair), although women comprised 48.4% of faculty. URM faculty held about 9% of overall leadership positions while comprising 10.8% of faculty.

As the most recent report of the Association of American Medical Colleges' State of Women in Academic Medicine highlights (Lautenberger & Dandar, 2024), data indicate that new systemic, institutional-level interventions are needed to address and achieve gender equity and inclusion in academic medicine.

To address these gaps, this two-year intervention focused on implementation of systemic processes and increasing accountability measures for leadership positions across the 28 SOM departments. We hypothesized that LEAD would increase: 1) Use of standardized processes and procedures for leadership selection and 2) The diversity of faculty in departmental leadership positions.

Methods

The LEAD intervention built upon ongoing UCSF best practices for external searches and baseline data to develop, pilot, and evaluate a leadership toolkit to initiate structure, processes, and transparency in departmental leadership searches. While developed in an Academic Medicine setting, the toolkit materials were created based on theory and research evidence drawn from literature on higher education and organizations broadly and, as such, are applicable across institutions of higher learning (Van den Brink et al., 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Whittaker et al., 2015). The materials developed aimed to expand clarity and transparency in selection of faculty for leadership positions through implementation of systematic processes and accountability structures including for initiation of the search (e.g., position description and development of the search committee), the facilitation of best practice educational measures and safeguards against unconscious bias, and the use of accountability measures.

Toolkit Materials to Facilitate and Track Promising Practices

The LEAD Toolkit involved comprehensive resources for implementing systemic and transparent processes and procedures, as well as accountability measures for leadership, to facilitate and track use of promising practices for internal departmental leadership position selection. Some of the resources were adapted from existing best practices for external faculty searches through the UCSF Faculty Equity Advisor Program, while novel resources specific to departmental searches were also developed by the LEAD team (e.g., Guide to Departmental Leadership Positions, Central Repository of Shared Job Descriptions).

These resources comprised:

1. *Limiting Bias: Promising Practices for Searches*

This seven-page document covered disparities in representation of women and underrepresented groups in academic medicine overall and in leadership positions, current research on the science of unconscious bias and how it impacts hiring and advancement broadly and in higher education specifically, and strategies and resources for combating unconscious bias on individual and institutional levels. Key links and additional resources are included at the end of the document.

2. *Your Responsibilities as a Search Committee Member*

This one-page resource reviewed concrete strategies for guarding against unconscious bias in search processes (e.g., taking the Implicit Association Test, leveraging Faculty Equity Advisors for external searches), developing a diverse pool (e.g., broadly disseminating job descriptions), equitably evaluating the pool (e.g., agreeing on criteria in advance, using a consistent evaluation tool, and ensuring applications are reviewed by a minimum of two reviewers), and conducting standardized interviews.

3. *Guide to Departmental Leadership Positions*

This one-page resource outlined practices to ensure that internal selection for departmental leadership positions is equitable and inclusive. This included guidance to define and advertise the position in a clear standardized way.

4. Central Repository of Shared Job Descriptions

This resource is a central repository of shared job descriptions across departments to assist committees in generating descriptions. As an indicator of institutionalization of our efforts, the UCSF Dean's Office reported that they regularly directed Departments working towards instituting systemic processes for leadership position selection to this resource.

5. SOM Chair Accountability Survey

This report and action plan, developed and administered through the SOM Dean's Office, tracked faculty and leadership composition on an annual basis in each of the 28 Departments in the SOM.

After creating the above tools as part of the pilot project, we facilitated listening sessions with key stakeholders including the Chairs and Directors in the UCSF SOM in addition to the Department Diversity Leaders, faculty members designated by each department Chair annually to lead diversity work in their respective Departments, to present the materials and solicit feedback. Buy-in was high: 86% percent of Chairs agreed that the intervention would facilitate implementing transparent processes and procedures in the selection of leadership positions. We also held sessions training Department Diversity Leaders in facilitating best practices in searches for leadership positions. After obtaining feedback and buy-in from the Chairs and Directors, we disseminated the materials within SOM departments.

Evaluation

The success of the LEAD intervention was assessed both in terms of individual process in response to institutional and policy aspects of the intervention (e.g., did they engage in best practices/implementation of tools and resources?) and in terms of composition of leadership positions. Both change in use of search processes for leadership selection and composition of leadership were measured via the annual SOM Chair Accountability Survey, as well as via qualitative data from the Dean's Office of the SOM.

Results

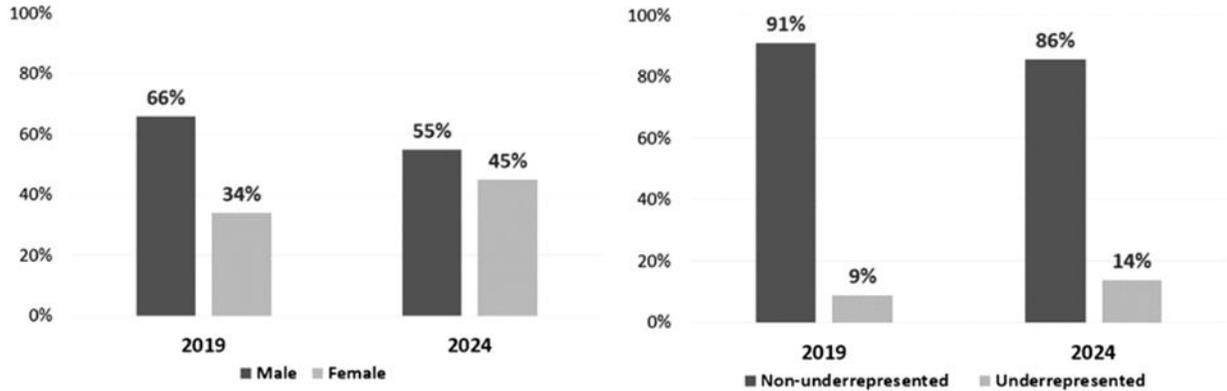
Increased Accountability in Leadership Selection

Through this partnership, we have seen increased focus on accountability in selection of leadership positions across departments in the SOM. Specifically, per the Director of Strategic Initiatives in the SOM Dean's Office, the annual Departmental Chair Accountability survey indicated "an increased focus on instituting open calls for nomination and search committees for all leadership positions." The Dean's Office 2022 Chair Accountability Survey indicated that 96% of departments had instituted formal search processes and job descriptions for leadership positions rather than Chair selection/appointment, as compared to 50% in 2019 (Figures 1a-1b).

Representation Outcomes

Recent data showed an increase in women and historically underrepresented faculty in leadership positions (Figure 2a-2b).

Figures 2a and 2b



Note:

Figure 2a. Percent of women faculty in leadership positions* in the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine, 2019 to 2024.

Figure 2b. Percent of underrepresented faculty in leadership positions* in the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine, 2019 to 2024.

*This data reflects change in the leadership positions Dean, Vice Dean, Associate Dean, Department Chair, Organizational Research Unit Director, Vice Chair, Division Chief, and Residency Director. Source: UCSF School of Medicine Dean's Office.

Institutionalization and Sustainability

As an additional indicator of institutionalization of the LEAD intervention, the Dean's Office regularly directs Departments working towards instituting systemic processes for equitable and inclusive leadership position selection towards the LEAD project Job Description Repository. This institutionalization of efforts holds promise for sustainability of these changes and longer-term impacts on climate.

Discussion

The LEAD intervention was developed based on organizational theory suggesting that successful systemic change is effectively driven by a multi-pronged approach across levels of an organization. As such, LEAD entailed institutionalizing new procedures while also providing educational materials entailing individual reflection on bias and promising practices for searches.

Results suggest that the LEAD intervention enhanced clarity and transparency in selection of faculty for leadership positions through implementation of systematic processes and accountability structures for initiation of the search (e.g., clear position descriptions and the development of a search committee), the facilitation of best practice educational measures and safeguards against unconscious bias (promising practices and other succinct accessible materials), and the use of accountability measures like collection of data through a yearly departmental accountability survey administered by the SOM Dean's Office.

Importantly, the UCSF SOM's collaboration in integrating this research broadly into SOM initiatives and data collection was one of the major contributors to the success of this intervention. The Dean's office and Departments are utilizing and institutionalizing the LEAD resources.

Strategies for gaining buy-in and institutionalization across the 28 departments in the SOM were two-fold. We both engaged Department Diversity Leaders from each department for input and collaboration and communicated directly with Administrative Directors and Chairs in Departments to facilitate implementation of the toolkit materials.

Conclusions and Future Directions

This project reflects the importance of utilizing systemic processes, tracking, and accountability measures in the selection of leadership positions. Actively engaging stakeholders and maintaining accountability is key. Implementation of standardized and transparent processes to guide searches can contribute to more equitable allocation of leadership positions. For greater collective impact and to facilitate utilization by other organizations, most of the tools described have been made publicly accessible.

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Faculty To Administrator: Navigating Fears of the Transition to Academic Leader

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Abstract

Academic administrative leaders in higher education embark upon their new roles with little formal preparation. Faculty who make the leap face substantial changes in their work lives, some of which also impact their personal life and sense of self. While research and personal accounts have documented changes that faculty who move into academic administration must navigate, this qualitative study examines their fears and anxieties from early in the role transition process to after they have been in the administrative role for a while. An analysis of the experiences of 73 participants from different institution types and at different levels of administration highlights struggles and doubts specific to the real or perceived consequences of the faculty-to-administrator work role transition. Implications of the findings and ideas for how to support transitioners beyond traditional leadership development initiatives are discussed.

Keywords: Academic leadership, administration, leadership development, role transition

Introduction

It is well-documented that academic administrative leaders in higher education embark upon their new roles with little formal preparation, despite repeated calls over the years for more and better leadership development initiatives. Gmelch (2013) posits that “a radical change in our approach to leadership development in higher education must be achieved if we are to respond to today’s challenges” (p. 27). Given that most academic administrative posts are filled from the faculty ranks, those who make the leap face substantial changes in their work lives, some of which also impact their personal lives. Research and personal accounts have documented changes that transitioners must navigate but have not examined what fears and anxieties faculty moving into administration experience throughout the transition process. This study elucidates fears and anxieties experienced by faculty during the transition into academic leadership beyond the department chair level. The findings highlight struggles and doubts grounded in fear and anxiety specific to the real or perceived consequences of the faculty-to-administrator work role transition. Implications of the findings and ideas for how to support transitioners beyond traditional leadership development initiatives are discussed.

Literature Review

Role Transition

Role transition has been defined as the psychological and potentially physical movement between roles or positions in social structures (Ashforth, 2001). This paper focuses on voluntary macro role

transitions (henceforth simply referred to as role transitions). While further articulated by Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) as “passages between sequentially held organizational, occupational or professional roles” (p. 136) and by Ashforth (2001) as “the psychological and (if relevant) physical movement between sequentially held roles” (p. 7), the concept of macro role transition stems from Louis’ (1980) seminal work that parses varieties of career transitions. It has long been understood, at least as far back as Minkler and Biller’s (1979) work, that role transitions typically instigate role shock, where transitioners experience transient stress from navigating the discontinuity between roles, even when the change is desired and the transition conditions are smooth. Perhaps most stressful is that they are required to shift psychological and social investments from one role to another, in a process of separation and reincorporation (Ashforth, 2001). The level of stress is not predictable, as individual and environmental factors affect how a person will respond to a transition, as Allen and van de Vliert (1984) explain in their volume that explores role transitions through various lenses and in multiple contexts. Transitions are not solely or always experienced as negatively stressful or severe, as they provide opportunities for self-expansion (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013).

The work role transition period spans from appointment to the new position to when the transitioner has been accepted in the organization, thereby having undergone a process of organizational socialization (Ashforth, 2001). Numerous foundational and more recent theories and models of transition apply to work roles (Armstrong, 2012; Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Bridges, 1991; Nicholson, 1984; van Gennep, 2019), each indicating the complexity of what Weick (1995) coined the “sensemaking” process individuals engage in as they move through interpreting and acting in a new role and its associated context. There is not an immediate leap to a new way of being and knowing; it takes time to mentally let go of a prior role and move into a new one.

Most specific to this paper, Armstrong’s (2012) model is based on data from teachers transitioning to vice principalships. While participants anticipated a linear transition process, their actual experience was chaotic, resulting in a model that depicts an “iterative pattern of recurring cycles” where “successive phases of the transition are conceptualized as a constellation of epicycles” with each phase building on previous cycles (p. 405). Epicycles include entry-exit, immersion-emersion, disintegration-reintegration, and transformation-restabilization, which operate in a continuous, regenerative dynamic. Individuals experience the epicycles in different ways based on individual and environmental factors. The model supports Ibarra and Barbulescu’s (2010) argument that role transition is not complete until the transitioner develops a coherent self-narrative, reflecting resolution of their inner conflict and allowing expression of their new role identity.

Common Response to Change

Any significant change involves confronting uncertainty, requiring an individual to move – to some degree – from the known way of thinking, feeling, being and doing to the unknown. Even if desired, change involves loss. Loss can be around identity, relationships, plans, dreams, status, security, resources, attitudes, behaviors, meaning, belonging, or community, among other areas important to an individual’s sense of self. Bailey and Raelin (2015) describe loss as the cognitive and affective experience brought about when something once possessed is removed, with cognitive uncertainty triggering emotional anxiety. (Note, the *perception* of loss is sufficient to spur cognitive and affective responses.) This complex combination prompts what could be construed as resistance to

change, but what some scholars argue is actually resistance to loss (Heifetz et al., 2009). Through a psychoanalytic lens, people deeply fear change because it represents a threat to the integrity of the self, promoting resistance embedded in their conflicts, wishes, anxieties, and defenses (Eagle, 1999; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Faced with such profound potential losses amidst a change, people naturally hold on to their familiar and valued ways. Indeed, the closer the change hits to the core of the individual, the more they will tend to hold on due to the emotional difficulty they experience (Heifetz et al., 2009; Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Even when individuals cognitively acknowledge that a change is positive overall, they likely also encounter the emotional responses associated with corresponding losses (Cutcher, 2009; Driver, 2009; Piderit, 2000).

Common responses to loss associated with change are sadness, fear, anxiety, and anger (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Although sadness may play into the mix, fear and anxiety are relevant for loss associated with a voluntary work role change given the move into the unknown. Anxiety has been categorized as a fear-like emotion (Raghunathan & Pham, 1999). However, “whereas fear is usually conceptualized as an adaptive, but phasic (transient) state elicited through confrontation with a threatening stimulus, anxiety is a more tonic state related to prediction and preparedness” (Adolphs, 2013, p. 81). In role transition, the threatening stimulus of change and its implications for loss – whether real or imagined – would trigger fear, while anxiety would set in as the individual attempts to predict and prepare for the impending changes. Such normal emotional responses to change should not be considered problematic, as they are essential for individuals to interact with and eventually adapt to their environment. For instance, a review by Phelps and LeDoux (2005) indicates that emotional responses sharpen perception, foster social connections, improve recollection, and facilitate action and decision making.

A connection can be seen between foundational change models and role transition models, which makes sense given the changes a role transition invokes. Fink and colleagues (1971) explain the first phase as Shock, where there is a threat to the existing structure of fixities, followed by Defensive Retreat, where there is an attempt to maintain old structures, followed by Acknowledgement, where existing structures are yielded, and finally Adaptation and Change, where a new structure and sense of worth are established. Tannenbaum and Hanna (1985) argue that the individual change process they articulate as holding on, letting go, and moving on has pervasive universality. Bridges (1991) uses language of endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings, while distinguishing, yet relating, change and transition. While the models sound simple, there is complexity embedded within each phase. Bailey and Raelin (2015) capture some of the complexity in a multilevel model based on the depth/scope of change and the individual adjustment process, integrating concepts from Terror Management Theory through the impact of actual or potential loss.

Faculty and Administrator Work Context

Although academic administrative positions below the presidency are sometimes filled with people from outside of academe, the majority of academic administrators have traditionally come through the route of faculty ranks to department chair, assistant dean or provost, dean or provost, and so on. Faculty and administrator work contexts differ notably with regard to responsibilities, perspective, autonomy, schedule, and relationships. Depending on the institution type and position, faculty are expected to focus on some combination of teaching, research and service. They typically function in a fairly unstructured environment with a high degree of autonomy, often working

independently and alone. While successful faculty work a lot of hours (Milem et al., 2000), they usually can take time to generate ideas, make decisions, and solve problems. Faculty are typically specialists devoted to their disciplines, their academic and intellectual pursuits, and their instructional role and responsibilities. They are trained to be skeptical and questioning. Most do not intend to pursue administrative careers in academia (Gmelch et al., 2011), which would require a reassessment of values, realignment of priorities, and shift of mindset and skillset.

Depending on the position, academic administrators have a range of responsibilities, most of which directly or indirectly relate to supporting teaching, learning, and research. Administrators tend to be tightly scheduled with limited control over their time and less autonomy than faculty. Their focus is largely on service. While some also pursue their research, teach, or advise students, they typically do not have as much time for these activities. With a range of issues coming at them every day, administrators often have to act quickly with little time to ponder ideas or decisions (Gmelch et al., 2011). Their work requires a high degree of communication, interaction, and collaboration, and an ability to appreciate an array of personalities. Standifird (2009) observes, "Whereas faculty excel by relying on their own intellectual capabilities, administrators succeed by effectively engaging the capabilities of others" (p. 25). While leading among the opportunities and challenges that arise, administrators are to present a public face of hopefulness and foster optimism about the future in others (Palm, 2006).

Given the differences in the work contexts of faculty and administrators, most faculty are grossly unprepared for the reality of full-time administrative work because the socialization of academic leaders is largely left to chance (Gmelch, 2013). Indeed, in a call for academic leadership development that echoes previous such calls, Gmelch and Buller (2015) list the deficiencies in preparedness of faculty taking on college- and department-level administrative roles. The list includes formal training; significant prior experience; a clear understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of their roles; a solid grasp of what it means to lead in a system of shared governance; a realization that full-time administrative work requires not a mere shift in focus but a metamorphic change from what their perspective was as a faculty member as well as a corresponding change in their self-image; an awareness of the full cost that administrative assignments will have to their careers as scholars, artists and researchers; and, preparation to balance their personal and professional lives (p. 2). Faculty-turned-administrators face a steep learning curve as they become rapidly immersed in uncharted waters, needing to navigate largely on their own. A former provost likened the transition to going to a new planet (Foster, 2006), while Gmelch (2000) illustrates the variety of areas in which faculty undergo metamorphoses when moving into a deanship.

Method and Design

Data for this study were collected as part of a larger study designed to understand experiences of how the transition from faculty to academic administration impacts the transitioner's identity, or sense of self. Qualitative methods were chosen as they are ideal for revealing and understanding complexities and process behind a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 1998) and for emphasizing meaning that people place on events, processes, and structures of their lives (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The study involved 73 faculty from bachelors, masters, and research-intensive institutions who had become academic administrators beyond the department chair level within the five years prior. Institutions were identified using the 2010 Carnegie Classification System. A

student research assistant identified potential participants using information found from a search of the selected institutions' websites and individual curriculum vitae. Personal invitations were sent to those selected to participate via electronic mail. In total, 21% of the 349 invited to participate agreed, with informed consent. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Participants

Of the 73 participants, 50 were working at bachelors- or masters-level and 23 at research-intensive institutions. Average time in their current positions was 2.25 years, with a wide range from 2 months to 5 years. Twenty-six (36%) changed institutions when moving into their current role. Average age was 52 years, ranging from 34-68 years. Reported sex was 33 female and 40 male, with only 7 females from research-intensive institutions. As expected, given representation in higher administrative roles, 89% reported being White/Caucasian, with others reporting as Asian American (1), Black/African American (3), Hispanic/Latina (1), Middle Eastern/White (1), and White/Native American (1). (See Table 1.)

Table 1
Participant Demographics by Institution Type

	Bachelors/Masters	Research-Intensive	Total
Number (<i>n</i>)	50	23	73
Time in Position (months)			
Range	2-63	4-60	2-63
Average	29	26	27.5
Institution Change			
Yes	14	12	26
No	36	11	47
Age (years)			
Range	34-68	39-65	34-68
Average	51	53	52
Gender (self-identified)			
Female	26	7	33
Male	24	16	40
Race (self-identified)			
Asian American	1	0	1
Black/African American	2	1	3
Caucasian/White	45	20	65
Hispanic/Latina	1	1	2
Middle Eastern/White	1	0	1
White/Native American	0	1	1

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using in-depth, semi-structured interviews that lasted 30 minutes on average. Following contextual questions, participants were asked questions that addressed issues of identity related to their transition from faculty to administration. The questions that informed this study included the following: 1) Prior to and during the transition, what were your fears about moving from faculty to administration? 2) What are your fears now that you have made the transition and been in the role for a while? While the term "fears" was used in the initial question, the terms

“worries” and “concerns” were used interchangeably during follow-up questions and conversation. While none of the terms were defined for participants, a common definition of “fear” is unpleasant emotion or thought (including anxious concern), caused by being frightened or worried by something threatening or dangerous that is happening or might happen (Cambridge, n.d.; Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The terms were used interchangeably and in colloquial style to align with everyday usage rather than attempting to guide participants’ responses to suit scientific conceptualizations. Most participants were eager to engage in the interview because they did not have many safe spaces to discuss the “real” experience.

The constant comparative method for data analysis was utilized because it is suitable for the inductive, concept-building nature of qualitative approaches (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, open coding was employed to identify concepts and group them into categories based on commonalities. Next, axial coding was employed to confirm that the concepts and categories accurately represented the data and to explore the analytic relationship between the concepts and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Concepts and categories were constructed and revised by continually comparing one unit of data to the next, and each data unit coded to represent its theme and, if relevant, subtheme. Two student research assistants also independently coded each data unit to enhance trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1998). Themes, subthemes and the data units they comprised were determined by strong agreement, with at least two of three coders in agreement. A log of coding procedures and journal of the researcher’s process and thinking were kept to enhance the study’s reliability (Merriam, 1998). Responses were also coded to retain participant confidentiality and to maintain traceability to the original source (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Contextual Considerations

It was not feasible to capture all the individual and environmental factors that could affect how a participant responded to their transition; however, it is useful to consider three contextual elements that may influence fears. Participants explained how they came to be in their current position, their extent of exposure to administration prior to the move, and the teaching and research expectations of their position.

Path to Current Position

Less than one-third (29%) of participants reported they applied as a conscious pursuit of an administrative position, without acknowledging if they were encouraged to do so. More than two-thirds (71%) reported they were tapped, encouraged, or invited to pursue the position. Most of the participants moved into administration at their current institution, with only 12 moving to a new institution. For most, the shift to administration was largely unexpected, and for some it was on their radar as a possibility or what one deemed a “subconscious desire,” but arose sooner than planned.

Based on participants’ explanations, the unexpected shift can come out of the blue but most often seemed to be what was called a “gradual evolution” or “drifting in,” where one thing led to another, agreement to a little time or one committee led to a little longer time or a larger-impact committee or the next role, or interim turned permanent. Many who started as what one described as a “reluctant administrator” eventually said, “alright I’m in.” This gradual, sometimes unintentional,

evolution for faculty into administration has been a common path (Strathe & Wilson, 2006; Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002).

Exposure to Administration

Most participants claimed to have at least a glimpse of what they would be getting into as administrators, with many believing they had a moderate to strong sense. This sense of knowing was largely based on experience serving in other roles that one participant described as “quasi-administrative,” while a handful felt their roles in careers outside of academe provided insight that would transfer to academic leadership. A few noted that working with or having personal relationships with academic administrators provided a sense of what to expect. The few who engaged in formal academic leadership development programs through the ACE Fellows Program (American Council on Higher Education) or HERS Programs (Higher Education Resource Services) reported feeling well-prepared.

Despite most participants believing they had a moderate to strong sense of their new role before starting it, at least a quarter admitted they were surprised by the reality. In retrospect they could say that a full sense of the actual role does not emerge until one lives it, acknowledging they had “no idea it was as big as it is.” A common shock was the “level of intensity that you are not prepared for” including the “enormity of how many problems that come up.” There was much on-the-job learning, as is typical for campus academic leaders (Gmelch, 2013).

Teaching and Research Responsibilities

Approximately one-quarter of participants were expected to teach courses and a handful were expected to be research-active as part of their roles. Approximately one-third opted to teach annually or occasionally and 42% opted to continue their scholarly work, although at a much slower rate. Most others aspired to teach and pursue scholarship but reported they could not find the time. Emphasizing the load and pressures, Gmelch (2013) queries, “Where else in the leadership world do we expect our leaders to take their previous jobs into their new positions?” (p. 27). There was no notable difference in responsibilities or opting to teach or research across institution type.

Findings

Among a series of questions related to how the transition from faculty to administration affected their sense of self, participants were asked what their fears were about the move, both earlier in the transition process (henceforth labeled “earlier”) and after they had been in the position for a while (henceforth labeled “later”). As explained in the Method and Design section, the term “fears” was used in the initial question, and the terms “worries” and “concerns” were also used interchangeably during follow-up questions and conversation. Further, all three terms were used colloquially. Five themes emerged from the data (see Table 2). The themes of *failure*, *disconnect*, and *change in relations* were present early in the transition and once participants had been in the administrative role for a while. While *failure* and *disconnect* showed up differently over time, the theme of *change in relations* remained over time and came to be accepted. The theme *vanishing autonomy* was clear only early in the transition, while the theme *meaning and impact* arose once participants had been in the administrative role for a while. Notably, emergent themes did not

differ based on whether or not the faculty moved to a new institution for the administrative role, and did not differ by gender or institution type.

Table 2
Emergent Themes Compared Over Transition Time

Theme	Earlier	Later
	Prior to and during transition from faculty to administration	After being in administrative role for a while
Failure	Not Ready Enough, Not Right Enough	It's About Me, But It's Not About Me
Disconnect	Becoming Unmoored	Floating Out to Sea
Vanishing Autonomy	Called It	
Change in Relations	"Other" in the Eyes of Others	"Other" in the Eyes of Others
Meaning and Impact		Wasting My Time?

Theme 1A - Failure: Not Ready Enough, Not Right Enough (earlier)

As the most pervasive fear among the themes, almost half of participants indicated they had a weighty fear of failure in the earlier stages of transition from faculty to administration. Most spoke generally that they were afraid they would not do a good job because they lacked the necessary skills, traits or preparation. Even those who felt prepared worried that they would not be good enough. While they chose a move understood to be outside of their comfort zone, many participants were concerned they would be operating outside of their "talent zone." A dean 15 months into the role at a new institution explicitly named the phenomenon, stating:

My biggest fear is that I will fulfill the Peter Principle. You know, I've reached my highest level of incompetence...and part of that fear was not being able to back out of it...reaching my highest level [of incompetence] and staying there. And ending my career as one of those deans.

Conjuring the idea of "one of those deans" points to fears about being a failure tacked onto one's identity, leading to the question: How will I see myself and be seen if I'm "one of those deans" (i.e., a failure)? An external hire 16 months into the provost role painted a vivid picture of the potential for "a failure" being added to their identity with the explanation "that would be a pretty uncomfortable role to inhabit, to be slung out of the dean's office and retreat to a department that you don't really know very well, you know, as an acknowledged failure." These comments indicate the potential for having to deal with an internal, personal sense of failure, as well as being perceived by others and externally or publicly labeled as a failure.

When participants dug into specifics about what else drove their fear of failure, a list of potential inadequacies emerged but each was mentioned by only one or two participants. Falling within the

skillset and traits category were questions about having enough diplomacy, wisdom, authority, authenticity, or patience. Some wondered whether their style would be acceptable or if they would have the ability to keep up with the workload. One dean at a new institution questioned if he was “emotionally strong enough for the criticism and the lack of trust.” Only one participant mentioned gender as a factor, noting the pressure of successfully leading in a context where not many women have held leadership roles.

Concerns about navigating certain duties of the job and not achieving expected goals fueled some fears of failure. Figuring out how to deal with budget, policies and personnel issues emerged as likely challenges. One dean explained,

I don't know if I understand all this very detailed budget and policy stuff quite well enough. And if I don't understand it, maybe I never will...I think that on an ongoing basis, deans should always worry about whether they're handling personnel issues right. Because there's not a playbook for any of those, right? Even the ones where there is a policy, the playbook doesn't exist for how you deal with it.

Further, participants acknowledged that some fear of failure was driven by other people counting on them to do the job well, either broadly speaking or to accomplish a specific goal. One dean reflected, “what happens if I lead all these people who put all their confidence in me and we don't get accreditation? You know, and the world thinks, oh it was all because of [the dean].” This comment further illustrates not only the personal aspect of failure, but the impact of being perceived by others as a failure on how one sees oneself.

Once again perceptions by others played a role alongside fears about skills, traits, styles, and falling short of goals, indicating an intertwining of fear-of-failure drivers. Such complexity is captured in this response from a 5-month-new dean who identified as an African American male:

How would I be perceived? You know, would I be able to command the respect of peers? Would I be able to create good programs and move them in a direction that I believe that we needed to go? That I would be seen as less than – particularly since we had a great dean who accomplished some really good things...the perception – am I really capable of doing this, and can I interact with people in an authentic and authoritative way, in order to be seen as the dean of the [name] school?

For some participants, fears of failure were narrowly focused on one or two issues, whereas for others the fears stemmed from a swirl of possible failure points that seemed to interact with and amplify one another.

Theme 1B - Failure: It's About Me, But It's Not About Me (later)

Fears of failure did not resolve for many participants once they had been immersed in the administrative world. Rather, fears tended to shift to potential failure points that were more specific and complex. Although a few conveyed that the fear of general inadequacy lingered, worry about making big mistakes, or that they couldn't ultimately deliver on what they promised due to resource limitations (with a couple adding on a fear of being fired), most responses indicated fears

of failure that were less self-focused and more embedded in institutional or systems thinking. Responses were articulated in a way that perhaps wasn't possible before beginning the new role, now that participants had lived the reality and learned more about the intricacies of their administrative work.

A common example of such fears that were less about participants personally and more about their actions within the system was failing at decision-making. Participants pointed to failing at decisions regarding sticky personnel situations, whom to hire to serve alongside them in leadership, finances and budget, and the direction things should go and how to work with people to move that direction. While fears of not knowing how to deal with personnel issues and the budget were noted prior to beginning the role, they weren't framed as decision-making or as part of the system at that stage; rather, they were framed as fear of personal ineptitude. As time passed, concerns were instead noted about making decisions that would, for example, change momentum to undermine the confidence and trust built with faculty, or that would disrupt harmony.

Other examples of fears of failure that indicate a shift from "about me" to a more complex mix of focus on self, other, and institution included giving the right advice to people, not violating confidentiality policies, navigating the budget (a dean of 15 months went so far as to exclaim, "I'm afraid that I'm going to wind up in jail because I can't figure out the budget!"), balancing between being an advocate for faculty and responding to administrative needs of the university, and communicating well enough. An interim dean explained that "my anxieties now are more about being able to grow enough in the role to do some of the things that I can see ahead of me need to be done...I need to develop the capacity for more longer-range thinking." Another participant, after being in the new role for four years, elaborated upon how his fear of failure became more specific as success in the role led to more to do. He stated,

I still come to work every day fearful that I'm going to miss something, fearful that I'm going to drop the ball...so my portfolio's expanded, and it's expanded because I've done good work in the past...I have not gotten to the point where the job has become easier because I've now mastered everything. I keep getting new things to do...I'm confident that I can continue to be successful in the job. It's just the individual pieces of the job that continue to worry me.

Theme 2A - Disconnect: Becoming Unmoored (earlier)

Fear of becoming disconnected from teaching, students, research and creative activity, and faculty resonated strongly with one-quarter of participants earlier in the transition. The essence of the fear was articulated as "losing my identity as a faculty member" and the consequences of such loss. This fear makes sense because faculty tend to carry a strong identification with their professional role (Strathe & Wilson, 2006). There was concern that administrative work would not be as fulfilling and that a return to teaching or a research agenda would never happen or be very difficult. A few participants worried that disconnection from faculty life would undermine their reason for entering administration. One explained that she was "afraid that the change in standpoint would destroy my ability to be an advocate for faculty and students," while another feared that "you become so detached...from the academic side of the house that you just become a bureaucrat, and you forget what it is that you are trying to do, get through all this bureaucracy for." This fear of disconnect and

its potential impact is likely why approximately one-third of participants who did not have teaching or research responsibilities opted to teach annually or occasionally and 42% opted to continue to their scholarly work.

Theme 2B - Disconnect: Floating Out to Sea (later)

After being in administration for some time, the fear of disconnect persisted for some participants but it shifted toward fear of being “stuck” in administration. In their minds, being stuck meant forgetting what it is like to be faculty, becoming less relevant in the classroom, lacking confidence they can catch up with developments in their field, and weakening writing and research skills. For instance, a 65-year-old dean with over four years of experience in the role questioned being equipped to teach since he was “getting out of date in terms of being an electronic person...[with] all these new teaching things” and wondered if he would still enjoy teaching. An associate dean in the role for 16 months layered the concern about perception of faculty colleagues, worrying about “no longer understanding what it means to be a faculty member after I do this job for a while. And what do I need to do to continue to garner a certain amount of credibility with the faculty?”

Although participants were not specifically questioned about whether their fear of disconnect became reality, some acknowledged that it did. One asked, “Will I lose my sense of artistry?” and responded to her own question: “The answer is yes, you do.” Another fleshed out moving into administration as “fears or the unfortunate reality that...you just get pulled more and more away from...the things I got into higher education to begin with.”

Theme 3 - Vanishing Autonomy: Called It (earlier)

One-quarter of participants commented on the early onset of fear of losing control over their time and having less autonomy. Many were especially concerned about having less time for family due to working more hours. Some spoke explicitly about not having control over their schedule or the work itself. One participant stated, “My concern was, are you going to strap me to a desk? Or if I get my job done, will I retain the flexibility...to do what I want to do in the professional arena?”

Although participants were not questioned about whether their fears came to fruition, some offered either a resentful or resigned acknowledgment that they did. A 2-year dean reflected on her fear that “it would be really painful not to have control over my own time. That I would regret giving up the flexibility of a faculty career...I think it was justified,” while an almost 5-year provost and vice president admitted with an element of remorse: “I’ve lost all control of my life.” Whatever compelled these faculty to move into administration, they had a sense of the impending impact on their time and autonomy and were now living the reality. One lamented,

I knew I was walking away from what I loved and what was going to be flexible...faculty don’t realize how amazing their schedule is...you still get to decide...now I don’t get to make any choices. My day is scheduled by my secretary.

When reflecting on whether their fears had changed since being in the administrative role for a while, not many mentioned that the initial fear of losing control over time and autonomy persisted. Rather, they felt the loss on a daily basis, remarking, “It’s just the reality and you accept it.”

Theme 4 - Change in Relations: “Other” in the Eyes of Others (earlier and later)

A notable fear echoed by almost one-quarter of participants was anticipation of shifting relationships with faculty colleagues and ability to retain friendships and goodwill. They worried about navigating the dynamics of professional roles, collegiality, and friendships. Articulations of this fear were stark and succinct, such as a dean concerned about “being widely hated. I didn’t want to become that scapegoat too much”; an interim dean worrying that “my colleagues were going to put me in a new box, and I wasn’t going to be able to get back out”; a vice president acknowledging “losing support from the faculty. In other words, being seen as a stooge of the president”; and an associate dean “being very aware of that faculty/administrative divide. Realizing I was going over to the other side.” The fear of change in relationships did not emerge as a fear after participants had been in their administrative roles for some time. It was seen as another case of “It’s just the reality and you accept it.”

Theme 5 - Meaning and Impact: Wasting My Time? (later)

While fears of failure and disconnect persisted (although in different forms) as participants served as administrators, only one new fear emerged over time for some: not doing meaningful work or making an impact as an administrator. Once these transitioners had some experience, they pondered whether they were pursuing a worthy endeavor or wasting time. For instance, an associate dean and dean of five years considered,

if it doesn’t make a good difference, then I’m really wasting my life...it’s really got to move us forward in some way, or it’s got to make life better for our students or the staff or the faculty... And when I come away with the answer, like no...Well then I need to get back in the saddle and make sure that what’s on my calendar actually means something.

The concern is on both personal and professional fronts, as indicated by the reflection of an interim dean:

I’m allotting a considerable amount of time at this stage in my life, doing what I think is honorable good work, but not in ultimate preference of what I want to accomplish in my life. What I want to accomplish in my life is creative...So I do occasionally wonder if the kind of work I’m doing as dean is actually as valid as the work I would be doing as a faculty member and teacher.

A 15-month dean at a new institution commented on the fear of wasting the last of his career on administrative work that he experienced as tedious, uninteresting, paper-pushing, and unimpactful.

Discussion and Implications

Participants in this study were going through a role transition that required a substantial shift from relying upon established knowledge, skills, habits and relationships, into unknown territory to eventually establish new ways of knowing, being, and doing. Their fears indicate the transient stress experienced from navigating role discontinuity between faculty and administrative work (Gmelch &

Buller, 2015; Minkler & Biller, 1979). A significant factor for consideration arises from the fact that while this study's sample is relatively balanced in terms of gender, the overwhelming majority (89%) identified as Caucasian/White, and there is a wide range of age and time in position. Consideration of the findings must especially take into account that faculty and administrators of color have different experiences in academia and in leadership than their Caucasian/White counterparts (Dancy & Jean-Marie, 2014; Settles et al. 2019; Thacker & Freeman, 2021; Turner et al., 2008). Further, the intersection of gender and race adds to the complexity of differing identity-related experiences (Gause, 2023; Turner & González, 2011). It's also important to recall that participants varied in paths to their current position, extent of exposure to administration before the transition, and teaching and research responsibilities.

While all individual and environmental factors that would make an individual's transition unique cannot be known, the aggregated responses reveal themes of grappling with sensemaking as transitioners attempted to exit their faculty role and enter their administrative role (Weick, 1995). Their grappling may have been intensified by the fact that over two-thirds were not expecting such a transition, at least not so soon. The findings align with a normal response of fear and related anxiety associated with change and loss (Bailey & Raelin, 2015; Heifetz et al., 2009; Kegan & Lahey, 2009), with transitioners attempting to predict and prepare for what they imagined to come (Adolphs, 2013). In this case, the articulated potential or actual losses were specific to transitioning from a faculty role identity to an administrative one. Fears emerged as transitioners' role identities, thus sense of selves, became ambiguous during the liminality of transition. For many, fears developed while anticipating the actual role shift, affirming that the transition process begins at the appointment of the new position even before the role is formally occupied (Ashforth, 2001). In some form, fears persisted as the transition continued, even for those who had been in administration for up to five years. One limitation of the study design is lack of attention to the significance of time spent in the administrative role. It would have been more insightful to document fears within stricter time periods, as experiences and perspectives evolve as socialization to the role unfolds. This approach would have also allowed for alignment of findings with transition periods designated by particular models.

Fear of failure weighed heavily on transitioners, given the visibility and stakes of a role transition from faculty to administrator, especially within one's current institution. Individuals who envision themselves failing anticipate experiencing shame and humiliation (Brown, 2015), and potentially insecurity about their future, upsetting valued colleagues or losing their interest, and devaluing of self (Conroy et al., 2002). Insecurity was reflected in participants worrying about being "slung out" of their administrative role and pondering what their professional future would then entail, while some commented on how they would be perceived by colleagues if they were to make notable mistakes or not meet expectations. The questioning did not dig in enough to clarify whether transitioners who feared failure would see such situations as personal shortcomings or whether they would internalize feelings of failure. It would be sensible to assume that since they had managed to climb the faculty ranks and had the courage to step into an administrative role largely unprepared that they would possess a growth mindset, in which case they would be less likely to internalize "failure" as an identity and instead pursue mastery through seeking challenges, feedback, and improvement (Dweck, 2006). Also notable is that although some participants maintained a general fear of failure once they had been in the administrative role a while, most shifted to fears that were more specific and complex as well as less focused on themselves and

more on how failure would impact others and the institution. This shift could speak to their incorporation or reintegration into the administrator role and adoption of the mindset and systems thinking that such a leadership role identity requires (Armstrong, 2012; Senge, 2006; van Gennepe, 2019).

Fears of disconnect, vanishing autonomy, and change in relations showed that faculty are accurately anticipating what is going to happen to them as administrators. While they have preconceptions of what claiming the identity of “administrator” will entail, they have limited lived experience upon which to understand the changes that will ensue. Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) explains, “We are ready with culturally constructed labels long before we encounter the realities, even to the point of saying, ‘This is a heart attack,’ ‘I must be dying.’ We can call our fate by name before we meet it” (p. 4). In some ways, the faculty-turned-administrators in this study did call their fate, yet an intellectual grasp on a role doesn’t necessarily translate to experiential grasp (Kolb, 2015). A number of other studies and individual accounts detail the experiences of faculty who have moved to administration, with common losses being focused on teaching and research, control over time and schedule, and relationships with faculty colleagues and friends (Gmelch et al., 2011; Nielsen & DeHayes, 2013; Perlmutter, 2023; Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). The changes impact sense of self, balance of personal and professional lives, and belonging to community, among other areas. Some transitioners who had been in the administrative role for a while volunteered that the losses they feared indeed came to fruition. Their resigned acceptance aligns with a normalization of what was once feared having become ordinary life as part of their administrator identity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2002).

It was only after being in administration for a while that some transitioners feared they were wasting their time (or life), questioning whether they were doing meaningful work or making a worthy impact in their role. This finding echoes two recent studies that showed that chief academic officers and academic deans considered feelings of role relevance and ability to make an appreciable difference as very or moderately important reasons for staying in or exiting their roles (Henk et al., 2022; Wepner et al., 2024). Believing a role and its impact are meaningful provides the occupant a sense of purpose and significance beyond formal duties (Krause, 2004). Individuals seek meaning not just in life globally, but specifically in the career domain because they are defined by others and themselves partly in terms of their roles: If the roles are meaningless, then so are they. Even if a role is not regarded as self-defining, the sheer expenditure of time and energy on role performance necessitates some kind of justification (Ashforth, 2001, p. 64). Defining by self and others based on effectiveness in work role, along with a corresponding sense of and perception of meaning and purpose, are key contributors to personal as well as leadership identity formation (Campbell et al., 2019; DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Therefore, concerns about wasting time on unmeaningful work are far from superficial, but rather a fundamental question and perhaps anxiety about who one is in this life.

The findings emphasize that faculty who transition to administration anticipate the losses and tend to manifest that anticipation through fear and anxiety. As noted, the losses they expect are not themselves surprising; however, the fact that transitioners can foresee and do worry about the significant losses associated with the change heightens the rationale for support as they navigate the transition process. Consistent with the typical underpreparedness of academic leaders (Gmelch, 2013), many of the transitioners in this study remarked that they were “winging it” or “thrown in

the deep end” to sort through most everything for themselves. Having new or additional avenues of support is especially valuable because transitioners’ usual community and support pillar of faculty colleagues and friends have “othered” them and are likely unavailable or inappropriate for talking with about the experience. Further, transitioners may have not yet been fully embraced by other administrators as a new community given that it takes time to be socialized and accepted into the new group (Louis, 1980). Indeed, Armstrong’s (2012) model based on teachers moving into vice principalships – a context somewhat similar in structure and culture – indicates that social isolation occurs within the first few weeks in the new role as familiar relationships change abruptly. The liminal state of transition presents a period in which transitioners are struggling the most and likely have the least amount of support. Ashforth (2001) points to the abundance of research that indicates instrumental and social support of peers, mentors, supervisors, family, and friends greatly facilitates role transitions (p. 189).

Helpful support can be addressed in part by more and better academic leadership development programs, calls for which have been strong and many over the years (e.g., Beach et al., 2016; Gmelch & Buller, 2015). Gmelch (2013) argues for the importance and effectiveness of institutions devoting resources to developing their own academic leaders in-house, starting at the department chair and dean levels. This approach would allow internal program leaders to determine the focus and content, while ensuring socialization to administrative roles and considering the unique campus culture. He explains a case study of the Academic Leadership Forum (ALF) implemented at one campus, where a range of positive outcomes emerged, including improvement in participants’ perceptions of their preparedness and effectiveness in 32 of 36 leadership tasks. The ALF program also facilitated a more sophisticated understanding of academic leadership and a shift in sense of identity from solely faculty member to more equally faculty member and administrator.

It’s unclear whether an ALF-like program would fully address the implications of the current study that indicate a need for a type of support and preparation that goes beyond learning about the role and into tougher conversations about life-altering changes that ensue. It appears that transitioners would be well-served not only with a solid formal leadership development program, but also with spaces and people that allow for deep discussions of fears, experiences, strategies, and opportunities. These spaces and people may have been established through the aspects of reflective practice and peer support pairs implemented in the ALF program, especially as the peer support pairs were intended to offer non-judgment, confidentiality, wisdom, and honest feedback (Gmelch, 2013). The question is whether institutional colleagues can truly establish the trust and comfort necessary for holding discussions about personal fears and struggles. Ultimately, positions and allegiances can change, and politics are at play in any organization.

There are variety of other (or additional) ways to create spaces for deep discussions of fears, experiences, strategies, and opportunities. Ideally, more than one approach will be pursued since one person or group cannot serve all needs. Institutions could provide the opportunity for, or require, transitioners to engage with a leadership/executive development coach and encourage coaching to begin as soon as the role transition is known (Carey et al., 2011; Nadeem & Garvey, 2020; Patterson et al., 2022). Effective coaching focuses on personal development and purposefully creates space for delving into hard questions and issues. Working with a coach – distinct from a mentor, counselor or therapist – has become more common for higher education leaders (Cavanaugh & Cavanaugh, 2018). Transitioners could also be advised on how to build a personalized

support team who work interdependently, combining their specific expertise and abilities, on the shared goal of building the transitioner's leadership identity (Shollen, 2018). A more traditional yet still relevant option includes formal or informal mentoring circles, mentoring pairs, or structured discussion groups, comprising peers around the same level of experience or more experienced administrators, or both. It may feel most comfortable in terms of confidentiality and vulnerability for participants to be from different outside institutions. A range of literature on mentoring is available for structural guidance (e.g., Bland et al., 2009; Middleton, 2015). All these options come with the challenge of establishing the trust necessary to dig into personal fears.

Leveraging other strategies can complement the availability of spaces for deep discussion and facilitate the sensemaking process. Ashforth (2001) describes various types of "transition bridges" that serve as rites of passage to help preserve a sense of personal continuity amidst role transition, such as anticipatory identification, mementos, comforting rituals, and exroles. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) focus on articulating identity self-narratives as a powerful transition bridge to manage strain during macro work role transitions. The strategy of bibliotherapy, or process of reading for personal development and healing (Jack & Ronan, 2008), should be readily embraced by academics and can be undertaken as a private or shared experience. Perhaps the availability of literature, including guidance, on the transition into academic administration attempts to fill the gap left by the paucity of formal leadership development programs (e.g., Adams, 2023; Gallos & Bolman, 2021; Gmelch, 2000; Gmelch et al., 2011; Martin & Samels, 2015; Ruben et al., 2021). Reading others' experiences and advice could stimulate self-reflection, reinforce certain fears as typical and justified, and serve as a springboard for deeper discussions.

Regardless of the approaches taken to support and develop academic leaders, some combination of methods should be ongoing because, as this study shows, transitioners' fears shift over time, and some eventually wonder about the meaning and impact of their administrative work and identities. As Gmelch (2000) notes, "If it takes seven to fourteen years to achieve expertise in our academic disciplines, why do we assume we can create an academic leader with a weekend seminar?" (p. 69). There have been enough calls over enough time for more effective academic leadership development that one questions whether higher education deals with an illusion of a broken system (Heifetz et al., 2009), where in this case the current system is maintained – especially by those who have the most power to change it – not out of lack of care, but because of scarce resources of money, time, and attention. But if the system is not changed and academic leaders are largely left to fend for themselves amidst the personal and professional fears and challenges, then institutions also lose because they will not get optimal performance from their administrators and risk losing them to dissatisfaction, burnout, or outright failure. Further, faculty may not choose to serve if they witness the challenges of their colleagues who braved the transition and struggled without support. With the difficulty of recruiting and retaining academic administrators (Henk et al., 2022), it makes sense to allot resources to developing and supporting those who lead institutions through the ever-shifting landscape of higher education.

Conclusion

This study investigated fears and anxieties experienced by faculty at various stages of the transition into academic leadership beyond the department chair level. The findings add further support to the call for more formal preparation yet indicate that transitioners need support and guidance that

goes beyond basic role preparation and leadership development. They need spaces and people that facilitate digging into, sorting through, and strategizing about the fears and consequences of shifting role identities. Being able to engage in what are likely vulnerable discussions may allow transitioners to be more successful and satisfied in their administrative roles, and perhaps their lives, which is a win for the faculty-administrators, their colleagues, and their institutions. Indeed, “developing faculty into academic leaders is both a *privilege* and *responsibility* of university administrators and institutions of higher education. The privilege is advancing colleagues and programs, while the responsibility rests in developing our most valued resource, people” (Gmelch, 2013, p. 34).

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“A Weirdly Complex Life”: Interim Leadership in Student Affairs

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Abstract

Interim leadership in student affairs is a common, yet poorly understood practice. Despite a plethora of literature on leadership, scholars have generally neglected this unique form of leadership in the research literature. This study fills a gap in this literature by using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of 12 interim leaders in student affairs. The findings paint a complex picture of interim leadership and showcase the various ways participants experienced their time as interim leaders including the way they navigated interpersonal relationships, their organizations, and ambiguity while also leading with intentionality. The internal experience of these interim leaders is also explored. The findings have implications for both student affairs practice and future research.

Keywords: Interim leadership, student affairs, hermeneutic phenomenology

Introduction

Those who work or learn within an organization of higher education will undoubtedly be familiar with the customary email or press release that a leader has chosen to retire or move on from the institution and in their place an interim leader has been named. Leadership transitions are routine in all organizations, both within higher education and outside higher education. Within higher education, the practice of naming an interim leader to occupy a role while an institution searches for a permanent leader is a common practice (Bernardo, 2022). Despite being a common practice, interim leadership has not been widely studied (Fisher et al., 2024).

The broader construct of leadership has been studied extensively across various disciplines (Bass, 1990; Dugan, 2024; Northouse, 2021). At the individual level, theories of leadership have provided insight into how leaders act, make decisions, and influence others. In the higher education and student affairs literature, leadership has similarly received significant attention (e.g., Bensimon et al., 1989; Bess & Dee, 2008; Kezar et al., 2006; Kuk & Banning, 2016). However, administrators have little research-informed guidance for the practice of navigating interim leadership appointments.

As such, drawing from Vagle (2018) and van Manen (1990), this study aims to build on leadership literature by gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interim leadership in student affairs. The purpose of the study was to understand the manifestations of the phenomenon of interim leadership in student affairs for the participants and identify commonalities among

experiences (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990). In the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, this study seeks a deep understanding of “what it is to be” (Vagle, 2018, p. 9) an interim leader in student affairs, while offering implications for further research and student affairs leadership practice.

Review of the Literature

Birnbaum et al. (1989) called leadership “among the most complex of human phenomena” (p. 101). Consequently, the leadership literature is voluminous and several overviews of leadership theory exist that provide a comprehensive account of this literature (Bass, 1990; Bensimon et al., 1989; Bess & Dee, 2008; Dugan, 2024; Kezar et al., 2006; Northouse, 2021). As such, this review will focus on the relatively limited research on interim leadership.

As noted, compared to the attention leadership has received in the literature, interim leadership has been severely neglected. A recent systematic review found just 61 published articles on interim leadership in the last 50 years (Fisher et al., 2024). As Fisher et al. (2024) note, the literature contains little uniformity on terminology, a definition of interim leadership, or the methodology used to study the phenomenon. Further, while some work has been done to understand the *socialization* and *sensemaking* processes of interim leaders, little work has been conducted that seeks to gain a deep understanding of the lived experience of interim leaders (Fischer et al., 2024). No such published studies can be found that undertake this endeavor within the specific context of student affairs. In addition to socialization and sensemaking, Fisher et al. (2024) include two more categories of existing literature on interim leadership, *selection* and *success*.

Within the general interim leadership literature, existing work has included presenting models of interim leadership (Farquhar, 1995) and typologies of different roles interim leaders can take (Goss & Bridson, 1998; Mooney et al., 2013). Recently, Woods et al. (2020) conducted a review of the literature and identified three themes of interim leadership roles: “(a) gap management and critical vacancy; (b) crisis management and turnaround; (c) change and transition management” (p. 175). Further, Woods et al. (2020) argued the literature lacks an articulation of a process of interim leadership and they proposed the *Interim Assignment Cycle* which consists of *preparation*, *entry*, *delivery*, and *exit*. These four processes are similar to a model proposed by Bernardo (2022) in the higher education context.

Interim Leadership in Higher Education

Within the higher education literature, studies have examined interim presidents and presidencies (Everly, 1993; Goff, 2012; Kremenek, 2021; Martin, 2006; Thompson et al. 2012; Tichenor, 2019; Trudeau, 2001; Waddington, 2001) and academic positions such as deans, department chairs, and academic librarians (Browning & Boys, 2012; Browning & Boys, 2015; Browning & McNamee, 2012; Hoffman & Barker, 2022; Huff & Neubrandner, 2015; Irwin & deVries, 2019). Additionally, various commentaries, first-hand accounts, and theoretical and practical pieces have emerged regarding interim leadership in higher education (e.g., Bain & Varela, 2020; Mundt, 2004; Sabbath, 2004).

Huff and Neubrandner (2015) surveyed individuals who served in interim roles such as deans, department chairs, provosts, associate deans, directors, and chancellors. The 91 survey

respondents described a variety of advantages and disadvantages to serving in an interim role. For instance, being seen by others as temporary, pausing one's research or professional goals, and lacking the ability to plan long-term were all disadvantages participants noted (Huff & Neubrander, 2015). Participants also noted they were expected to maintain their previous job responsibilities while adding on new responsibilities. Advantages included the ability of an interim leader to make difficult decisions or resolve issues before the appointment of a permanent leader, the ability to gain useful job experience and to see what the role was like before considering taking the role permanently and gaining a broader perspective of the institution (Huff & Neubrander, 2015).

Browning and McNamee (2012) found the interim academic leaders in their study used different sensemaking processes to understand their role, characterizing them as either *dutiful*, *traditional*, *aspiring*, or *self-conscious* sensemakers; Browning and McNamee further noted that the individuals performed their roles as either *trailblazing* or *caretaking* interim academic leaders. Regarding their identity as interim leaders, Browning and Boys (2015) noted their participants used five ways to manage their leadership identity: "*rewording of the interim title, differentially valuing their title, denoting the temporal nature of their role, understanding their access to power, and discerning their motivation for serving*" [emphasis in original] (p. 173). While these studies are limited to one institutional context, the findings help to paint the picture of a nuanced and varied phenomenon.

No published studies can be found that have examined interim leadership in student affairs exclusively. However, previous dissertation work (Boerner, 2010; Boulay, 2022; Culler, 2014; Jones, 2011; Nelson, 2020; Ondercin, 2009; Roybal, 2022) has explored the topic. In the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition, this work constitutes one element of the pre-understanding of interim leadership in student affairs we held as we embarked on the research process (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990). Pre-understanding is a part of the hermeneutic circle; the process of ongoing interpretation, where once a new interpretation is made, such new interpretation becomes our pre-understanding that then informs subsequent interpretation (Moustakas, 1994, Vagle, 2018).

A desire for professional development (Ondercin, 2009), financial motivation (Nelson, 2020; Ondercin, 2009), professional fidelity (Boerner, 2010; Boulay, 2022), and maintaining organizational stability (Ondercin, 2009), all emerged as motivations for accepting an interim role. Challenges experienced by participants upon stepping into an interim role included a lack of training (Ondercin, 2009) and working two jobs simultaneously as their previous position was not filled (Boerner, 2010). The role of confidence was prominent in these studies. Many of the participants across the studies felt increased confidence as a result of serving in an interim role (Boerner, 2010; Boulay, 2022; Nelson, 2020) while others struggled with self-confidence in their new roles (Boerner, 2010; Roybal, 2022).

Further, the authority of the interim leader and whether that authority was legitimate was a consistent theme (Boerner, 2010; Boulay, 2022; Nelson, 2020; Ondercin, 2009). Participants found several benefits to serving in an interim capacity, such as career advancement and gaining new experiences (Boerner, 2010; Nelson, 2020; Ondercin, 2010; Roybal, 2022). However, it was not a positive experience for everyone, and some were let down or felt betrayed at the end of the process (Boerner, 2010; Culler, 2014).

Methodology

This qualitative study used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to understand how former interim leaders in student affairs described the experience of interim leadership (Dibley et al., 2020; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990). van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology served as the overarching orientation, within which influence from others was drawn. While no set method or set of procedures exists in the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition van Manen (1990) offered the following explanation:

Hermeneutic phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic interplay among six research activities:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

These six activities guided this study, but van Manen (1990) specifically rejected adherence to any proscribed set of procedures. As such, the methods that were used took influence from the six activities but also drew influence from other qualitative methodologists.

Methods

Recruitment

The participants for this study were recruited using purposeful, criterion, and snowball sampling (Gay et al., 2012; Patton, 2002). The criteria for participation in the study were that participants must have previously served in an interim leadership role in student affairs at an institution of higher education in the United States, held an interim leadership role in student affairs for at least one academic semester or term, and experienced the phenomenon of interim leadership in student affairs within the previous five years at the time of their participation in the study.

After IRB approval, an initial call for participants occurred. I (first author) leveraged my professional network by sharing study information with current and former colleagues and via various public forums, such as student affairs Facebook groups. The advertisements contained a Google Form for potential participants to complete. The form included the recruitment statement for possible participants to read prior to completing the form. This recruitment effort led to 21 individuals completing the Google Form, indicating they met the sampling criteria, and that they were willing to participate in an interview. Demographic information was also collected on the Google Form. All 21 respondents to the Google Form were emailed the recruitment statement, provided with additional information about the study, and received an invitation to schedule an interview.

Of the 21 possible participants, 11 self-identified as women, eight self-identified as men, one potential participant self-identified as a transman, and one potential participant did not identify their gender. Regarding racial identity, of the 21 possible participants, 13 individuals self-identified as White, two potential participants self-identified as Black, one potential participant self-identified as Caucasian, one potential participant self-identified as Mexican American, and one potential participant self-identified as White non-Hispanic. Five of the 21 potential participants self-identified their ethnic identity. One potential participant self-identified as Caucasian, one potential participant self-identified as White, one potential participant self-identified as Latinx, one potential participant self-identified as Korean, and one potential participant self-identified as Caucasian American. The potential participants had a range of years of experience in student affairs between seven and 40 years. Of the 21 potential participants, 12 moved forward with scheduling an interview after being contacted.

There is no set number of participants in a qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002). Dibley et al. (2020) recommended an orientation that prompts the researcher to reflect on whether they have collected sufficient data to answer the research question(s) (Dibley et al., 2020). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, we continuously reflected on the process and the data collected. Once we had reached 12 interviews, we felt we had collected sufficient data to answer the research question fully.

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were employed to gather lived experience data from participants. This format calls for an interview protocol to be developed to guide the interview but allows for the exploration of emergent topics and directions during the conversation (Adams, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2017). Thus, the semi-structured interview allows for specific questions to be asked, but the interviewer retains the autonomy to guide the conversation as it naturally develops through the use of probes and follow-up questions (Patton, 2002).

Interview Procedures

Interviews were scheduled at a mutually convenient time and were conducted via Zoom. When scheduling the interview, participants were informed that the first question would be to ask them to describe their experience serving as an interim leader in student affairs and that specific examples of how they experienced the phenomenon would be helpful. This technique allowed the participants to reflect on their experience prior to the interview (Beck, 2021). The interviews were audio and video recorded, via Zoom, with permission from the participants. The interview recordings were then transcribed using Rev (Rev, n.d.), an online transcription service. Each transcript was checked for accuracy by listening to the audio recording of the interview and making corrections as needed.

Data Analysis

In phenomenological research, data collection and analysis are simultaneous and interrelated (Dibley et al., 2020; van Manen, 1990). Analytic memos were kept during the data collection process to capture emerging themes and insights. Once each interview was completed, it was

transcribed using Rev (Rev, n.d.). Listening to the audio recordings of the interviews and reading the transcripts constituted immersion in the data (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Dibley et al., 2020). The transcripts were read multiple times for greater understanding.

The interview transcripts were loaded into Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software, for further analysis (Dedoose, n.d.). The first round of coding was conducted using elements of *initial coding*, *in vivo coding*, *simultaneous coding*, *process coding*, *provisional coding*, and *concept coding* (Saldaña, 2021). The approach of using a combination of coding techniques allowed for the greatest flexibility and for the data itself to dictate the coding process. The goal of this initial, line-by-line coding process was to begin to identify thematic statements (van Manen, 1990).

Codes were combined as necessary to achieve overarching interpretive themes of the lived experience of interim leadership in student affairs. The codes were analyzed and evolved into component parts of the experience of interim leadership in student affairs for the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After the initial coding process, statements were re-coded with *is* and *means* codes (Saldaña, 2021). Statements coded *is* referred to a participant's descriptive account, while *means* referred to the hermeneutic interpretation constructed by the researcher. Through coding, writing, reading the transcripts, and reflection, the component parts "bubbled up" (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 127). As the analysis process progressed, the first author adopted the term *component part* to designate those aspects of the phenomenon that were most salient for the participants.

Trustworthiness

The techniques used in this study to demonstrate the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings are member checking, *analytical triangulation*, deep engagement in data collection, and *rich, thick description* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002; Tracy, 2010). Participants were given the opportunity to check their interview transcript for accuracy. All participants asked to review their transcripts, and seven of 12 participants replied that the transcripts were accurate. Second, analytical triangulation was employed by providing an early summary and interpretation of the participant's account of interim leadership in student affairs to the participant for feedback (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2002). This process ensured that as the analysis process continued, the participant had affirmed the accuracy of the account (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Deep engagement was achieved through immersion in the interview transcripts and recordings (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Dibley et al., 2020). Each recording was listened to multiple times and each transcript was read multiple times. Finally, rich, thick description is used to present findings. Rich, thick description, along with isolated thematic statements and participant quotes, is used to demonstrate the credibility of the interpretation (Benner, 1985, 1994; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Tracy, 2010).

Limitations

All research studies involving human subjects have limitations (Peoples, 2021). One limitation of this study was the demographics of the participants. While there was diversity in the sample

regarding geographic location, institution type, and position held, the study lacks racial and ethnic diversity. One participant identified as Black and one participant identified as White and Latinx; however, the remaining 10 participants all identified as White. Additional racial diversity could have offered a more complete understanding of interim leadership in student affairs and elicited unique nuances, allowing for an exploration of issues of racial equity in interim leader experiences (Bazner, 2022). There was greater diversity among the participants who responded to the Google Form indicating interest as noted above, but the participants who scheduled an interview were relatively homogeneous.

Further, a perceived limitation of the study involves the unique interpretations of the researchers. A different researcher with the same data could have produced different interpretations. Additionally, a different research question would yield unique results with the same data. For example, participants were not asked to distinguish between their role as interim leaders from their experience in a new position, but all these participants were experiencing a new role. If a researcher were interested in the process of stepping into new roles, this data may be useful. Finally, in all qualitative and phenomenological studies, a limitation exists regarding the ability to generalize the findings (Patton, 2002; Peoples, 2021). However, it is also not the intent or the purpose of a phenomenological study to generalize (Dibley et al., 2020; Peoples, 2021; van Manen, 1990, 2014/2016). Even so, it remains a limitation that the findings may not necessarily translate to other contexts.

Positionality

I (first author) entered this work as a mid-level student affairs professional who has not served in an interim leadership role. I have worked in two different student affairs organizations in my professional career. I have never had an interim direct supervisor, but I have worked for interim leaders in the organizational hierarchy. I hold subjective beliefs about the ways I have seen interim positional staff enact leadership. These experiences have been both positive and negative. The lack of direct experience in an interim leadership position may impact the research process. For instance, I may have formulated different questions if I had experience as an interim leader myself. The advantage of this lack of experience was that the interpretation of the data was not informed by first-hand experience.

I am also a person who holds numerous privileges. White privilege, cis privilege, able-bodied privilege, socioeconomic privilege, gender privilege, and privilege associated with sexual orientation, constitute various forms of power that are important to recognize and articulate. I recognize that these privileges engender certain biases that may impact the interpretation of data. As I conducted this work, I remained attentive to the ways I interpreted what was shared with me. Workplace harassment, discrimination, and marginalization are all possible topics that could be raised in a study on the lived experiences of individuals working in higher education and student affairs, and in some cases did emerge during interviews. My identities and privileges have shielded me from those experiences, but that is not the case for all. Great care was taken to ensure that I not only tell the stories of the participants in the most authentic way possible but that I also recognize and attempt to mitigate my own biases in the telling and interpretation of the participants' stories.

I, (second author), worked for 10 years in student affairs and have held faculty roles in two universities in higher education and student affairs graduate programs. I have served as a department chair and associate dean. I had one year of experience in an interim role when I was hired as Interim Dean of the School of Education at my current institution. Unlike the participants in this study, that role was a clearly stated one year role and I agreed not to compete for the position when I accepted the role. This experience informed my curiosity about the experience of interim leaders in student affairs, but I also knew that their experience would be unique as the roles are dramatically different.

Findings

Potential participants were asked to complete a Google Form to ensure eligibility. Only participants who indicated they met the inclusion criteria were asked on the Google Form if they were willing to participate in an interview. During some of the interviews, it became apparent that the participant had a different understanding of the recruitment criteria than we did when the parameters were put in place. However, in each case, the participant was still included in the findings of the study as their experiences offered valuable insight into interim leadership in student affairs. When participants are first introduced below, their roles and institutional type are described in ways to protect confidentiality including the use of pseudonyms but also provide some context for the reader. Information about each participant can be found in Table One.

Table One
Participant Information

Participant	Gender	Racial Identity (Ethnic Identity)	Years in Student Affairs	Number of Interim Roles Discussed	Number of Institutions Discussed	In an Interim Role at the Time of the Interview?
Scott	Male	White	12	3	1	No
Darryl	Male	Black	22	2	1	Yes
Tom	Male	White	15	4	1	No
Rita	Female	White	15	1	1	No
Sarah	Female	White	36	6	6	No
Anthony	Male	White	15	1	1	No
Andrew	Male	White	16	1	1	No
Mike	Male	White	24	1	1	No
Cathy	Female	White (Latinx)	28	1	1	No
Ashley	Female	White	8	2	1	No
Linda	Female	White	29	1	1	No
Dr. G	Male	White	35	3	2	Yes

The research question is answered by articulating five component parts of the phenomenon of interim leadership in student affairs and their various context-specific manifestations that emerged as the most salient for the 12 participants in this study (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990). The five

component parts that emerged from the interview transcript data constitute elements of “a *possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience* [emphasis in original]” (van Manen, 1990, p. 41). Accordingly, the component parts of the phenomenon of interim leadership in student affairs presented here are merely some of the possible manifestations of this particular phenomenon (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990). Further, it is important to note that this presentation is derived from a doctoral dissertation.

Navigating Interpersonal Relationships

All the participants of this study described navigating interpersonal relationships as interim leaders in student affairs, including the nature of the relationships they had with their supervisors, the nature of their relationships with peers, and the role of building trusting relationships with staff. Navigating interpersonal relationships also included redefining relationships and experiencing the impact of their predecessor on their relationships with others. Various context-specific manifestations of this component of interim leadership in student affairs emerged; however, for these participants, the necessity of navigating interpersonal relationships was a universal aspect of their experience as interim leaders in student affairs (Vagle, 2018).

Building Relationships

Building, maintaining, and negotiating interpersonal relationships was a key component of the experiences of most interim leaders in this study. For instance, Rita, who served as an interim dean of students at an elite, private institution in the Northeast, spoke of navigating challenging relationships with both the interim vice president she worked for during the first year in the interim role and the permanent vice president once they were hired.

Rita explained that when the permanent vice president arrived on campus, “I was unfortunately in a position where a new supervisor had come in and wasn't listening to anything really that I had to share.” Rita explained “[the] new VP was uncomfortable with me having better relationships with folks than her, and people coming to me for answers instead of going to her. That created lots of friction.” Rita thought her vice president seemed threatened by the relationships she had built on campus, even though they were coming into the institution as a new staff member.

Participants also spoke about their relationships with their peers. As interim dean of students, Rita felt she never gained the trust of her peers, or the other leaders within student affairs, but did have the trust and support of the staff she supervised, and staff in other areas of the division. Rita described a conversation she had with her staff, “I was like, ‘I'm not really the dean.’ And they're like, ‘but you are.’ And I'm like, ‘I don't really feel like it. I'm not really treated like it outside of this bubble.’” Rita wondered if other leaders in the division were threatened by her relationships with staff. Rita said she was willing to challenge senior leaders on important issues, and yet she believed that senior leaders thought she was unqualified for the interim role. These dynamics made a difficult job even more challenging.

Darryl, who served as interim associate vice president, described his organization as “very relationship-oriented.” His placement in the interim role was a way for him to build relationships. Darryl explained,

People know me, but they don't really know me. They don't know how I work, they don't know how I operate. They don't know if I fit within the context of the institution. ... She [the vice president] had to make me interim essentially to give me a chance to audition to all these other people to navigate relationships.

As an interim, Darryl could work closely with those who did not *know* him on a deeper level or know how he worked.

Many of the participants recognized that interim roles are challenging for staff who work in their organizations. Linda, who served as interim senior student affairs officer at a small, mission-driven institution with religious affiliation in the Midwest, described how being an interim leader in student affairs and a candidate for the permanent role created an awkwardness in relationships with staff, noting "I would regularly be standing up in front of the division and I would just acknowledge it. "This is awkward." Linda was able to work through the awkwardness by naming the "elephant in the room" and being open about her candidacy for the permanent (Senior Student Affairs Officer) SSAO role.

Cathy, an interim dean of students at a large, four-year public institution in the Southwest, was able to build strong relationships with her staff. However, Cathy felt the interim role was impacting her staff:

I think for my staff, they didn't like the interim role. We were in a groove, and so they didn't want any of that to change. ... I think your team is trying to figure out, "okay, who is this person who's leading our unit, and is this a temporary thing, and how temporary is it?"

Cathy worked at assuring her team that, even in the face of ambiguity, the department could continue moving forward.

Finally, Sarah and Mike shared similar sentiments regarding their relationships with staff. Both are consultants who served in interim leadership positions in student affairs and who came to their roles from outside the institution. Sarah, who served in six interim roles at institutions in the Northeast United States in the four years prior to her interview, described a component of her experience with interim leadership in student affairs as constituting a careful negotiation of interpersonal relationships and dynamics. However, the short-term nature of the role comes with an expedited ending to those close working relationships as well. Sarah explained,

You do build these relationships with the staff too. I definitely have staff from every interim that I'm still in contact with and that I see from time to time. But it's like you become part of the staff and then you leave. And part of your job is to prime them to work with somebody new, and then suddenly, you're not relevant anymore. So you got to be mentally prepared for that. They start getting excited for their new boss right at the time that you're leaving. So it's suddenly not about you anymore, and that's the way that it should be. But you have to kind of prepare for that. It's a lot of goodbyes in a short amount of time.

For Sarah, a major component of interim leadership in student affairs has been establishing, maintaining, and navigating interpersonal relationships. As Sarah noted, the nature of interim leadership in student affairs inherently expedites and creates urgency around this workplace dynamic.

Mike entered his interim director role at a large, four-year public institution in the South without the explicit goal of building long-term connections and relationships with his staff. He explained that this approach is a contrast to how he would work in a full-time role. Mike clarified,

I came to really care about the staff. I wanted to build a relationship with them, but I wasn't expecting to build long-lasting connections, friendships, and things like that, but it happened. I think that was kind of cool and that evolved.

While Mike wasn't expecting to build long-term friendships and relationships with his staff, it happened naturally as he worked closely with them. Mike was even asked by staff members to consider staying as the full-time director, but he had already determined he would not be a candidate for the role.

Redefining and Changing Relationships

Several participants discussed redefining and changing relationships as an element of their experience navigating interpersonal relationships while serving as interim leaders in student affairs. As soon as he became the interim associate vice president, Darryl thought that the relationships he had with his peers changed. He offered, "I learned pretty quickly, people will let you know when they don't like something really fast. When your position changes, it is very easy, you can probably clock the change in people's relationship with you with an egg timer." Despite changes to interpersonal relationships, Darryl described positive and supportive experiences with his peers as he navigated the interim associate vice president role.

Dr. G also experienced a shift in his relationships with other executives when he took over as interim vice president for student affairs at the flagship of a state university system in the South:

It's one thing to be able to observe the other vice presidents and have interactions with them and be known to them. I had a positive relationship with all of them prior to this transition. But when you actually sit at their table, that's now your table, there are things that shift and change.

Dr. G highlighted that as an interim leader, relationships change because expectations change. Similarly, despite being widely seen as a natural leader in a significant time of organizational transition, Tom, as interim associate dean of students at a mid-sized, public four-year institution in the Pacific Northwest, experienced interpersonal relationships that changed with the announcement of his interim leadership role:

It was also a very interesting spot ... some of them, nothing changed. They're like, "nope, doesn't matter what the role is." Others responded very differently knowing that [I] was in a very different role and [it] almost became that you're part of the "them" that makes the

decisions; therefore, you think differently now, or you respond differently now. And that was very few, but it was very clear for those few when we'd have conversations where there was a shift in how they approached it.

Tom discovered in his interim leadership role in student affairs that the nature and construct of some interpersonal relationships can change instantaneously as one advances in the organization.

The Influence of the Predecessor

Finally, the role of one's predecessor emerged as an element of navigating interpersonal relationships as an interim leader in student affairs. Predecessors, whether they were still at the institution or not, shaped participants' interim leadership experience and the ways they operated in the role. To lesser and greater degrees, the predecessor and the way in which others viewed them or their relationships with staff emerged as a dynamic that had to be navigated by many of the participants. For instance, Darryl reflected on his initial discussions with stakeholders:

It was important to me to go out and meet key players that my predecessor had been involved with. I will tell you those conversations were eye-opening. They were eye-opening. Perspectives about how the last person operated in the role, perspectives about what people felt on a big picture, about particularly the [housing department]. I think it was really necessary for people to see me as a person who was going to be a partner and operate differently.

Darryl learned quickly that it would be important to set himself apart from his predecessor and find ways to collaborate with campus partners.

Andrew, as interim director of residence life, and Dr. G had a similar experience with feeling the need to consider their predecessor when making decisions. Andrew explained,

I was given a lot of opportunity to take charge and be for all intent [and] purposes, the director, but most of my decisions were also then through the lens of I have to make a decision, but I also need to know that in six months my old director could be coming back into this position if he is not successful or does not stay in his elevated role, he could come back.

Because both Andrew and his supervisor were in interim positions, Andrew's supervisor could return to the role Andrew was occupying on an interim basis. Andrew knew that until he had more clarity on his supervisor's situation, he needed to be mindful that his supervisor could return to his role. This uncertainty and consideration of his supervisor impacted Andrew's decision-making process.

When Dr. G first stepped into his interim role, the vacancy arose because his predecessor had taken a different leadership role within the same system on an interim basis. This created a condition where Dr. G felt it was important to consider the possibility that his predecessor could return to his position. While Dr. G exercised agency to make day-to-day decisions, he felt he needed to consult his former supervisor on major decisions that could impact him if he were to return to the role.

Navigating the Organization

Another component of the experience of interim leadership in student affairs for the participants in this study was contending with organizational dynamics. Participants described navigating organizational transition and their experiences with compensation, workload, and exploitation. For the participants in this study, the experience of interim leadership in student affairs was significantly impacted by the context of the organization.

Organizational Transition

Navigating organizational transition and change was described by several interim leaders. As Tom expressed, "I've been here long enough to know none of it's permanent." As Tom pointed out, navigating organizational change is not a temporary endeavor. Organizations are constantly shifting and moving, and for some of the interim leaders in this study, those dynamics impacted their experiences.

For instance, while Tom was able to help shape the future of his organization as an interim leader, Linda had a different experience. Linda described how the organizational structure was changing during her tenure as interim SSAO. Previously, the SSAO reported to the provost, but early into Linda's tenure as interim SSAO, it was announced that the permanent SSAO would report to the President, but the change would not occur until the permanent SSAO was named. Linda described the dynamics:

Even though [the] institutional leadership acknowledged this is a less than ideal organizational structure, it didn't change until the new person came on board ... That impacted my experience because I was in a position that was interim, knowing from the outset that I would be a candidate for it, and not fully in all of the spaces where people had uniformly agreed this person needed to be. That made it to be ... a really complicated year.

Linda had to navigate organizational dynamics of change, ambiguity, and constraint. Linda found the most difficult part of her interim role was being left out of conversations where decisions that impacted students were made. However, despite the lack of access, Linda was able to find ways to intentionally advocate for students and staff, although her effectiveness in doing so was made more challenging by the organizational dynamics.

Workload, Exploitation, and Compensation

Being overworked or exploited was a manifestation of navigating the organization for several of the participants. At times, Rita worked 80 hours a week as interim dean of students. Rita expressed she was committed to "take on a lot of the burden" from her staff so they would not "burn out faster." This self-sacrifice for her team wore on Rita and was visible to her staff and ultimately contributed to Rita leaving higher education.

Anthony described a similar experience to Rita's with his workload. At the outset, Anthony described being excited to serve in an interim director role, at a small, private institution in the Midwest:

I was excited to do it. ... I was kind of expecting them to take some things off my existing plate, and they just did not. It was 70, 80-hour work weeks always because I was doing two full-time jobs.

Anthony explained the dynamic that occurred when he expressed this to the vice president:

I frequently said I didn't have enough time. I frequently said, "I can't get it all done." My former vice president is a classic gaslighter. It would be like, "I don't think that's how it is. Maybe you just need to use your time more effectively. Maybe you should just not go to as many meetings. Don't answer your emails as timely." And I was like, "cool. That's my whole job ... going to meetings and answering my emails because people need direction from me, so I can't do that. I'm doing too much." I was known on campus for being here at all times. I would be at my desk till 11:00 most nights, and I'd get in at about 7:30, 8:00 in the morning.

Anthony explained he could have "let the ball drop" and not have completed a task or planned a program, but ultimately, the students or himself would end up being hurt the most. Anthony "chose to grind" and continue to work because he felt he did not have a choice. He did not have a vice president that heard what he was saying. If he neglected some areas of his work, he would ultimately have to fix those issues down the road, and the students at his institution would suffer.

Several of the participants in this study also described how compensation, namely their frustration with their compensation or the communication regarding their compensation, impacted their experiences as interim leaders in student affairs. Anthony, Andrew, Rita, and Ashley all described taking on additional responsibilities or maintaining their responsibilities in their previous roles while in an interim leadership role without commensurate increases in pay. These participants felt exploited by their institutions as they were taking on more responsibility without additional compensation during their time as interim leaders.

Navigating Ambiguity

Numerous participants in this study spoke of the ways they encountered and navigated ambiguity during their experiences as interim leaders in student affairs. The uncertainty and opacity were filtered through the unique personal, organizational, and environmental contexts of the participants. Participants experienced ambiguity related to time and to the actual functions of the role.

Ambiguous Time

Several of the participants were initially told their appointment would be for a certain period of time but then their appointment was extended. Several participants went months without a clear understanding of where they stood in the organization or how the role they were occupying on an interim basis would be filled permanently. Scott served in several interim roles at a large public

institution in the Northeast and said he learned his first interim position would be extended a few days before it was set to end. Scott said, "It was the Thursday or Friday before my position was supposed to end, my boss came to me and said, 'Oh, you should come to work on Monday.'" Scott stated,

I was stressed as heck in thinking about that career progression and health insurance and money. The university was also providing me a place to stay on campus, so where was I going to be living? I was really stressed, and I'd go to my boss or bosses and say, "Oh, I'm really stressed". And they're like, "Oh, why?" And I was like, "Well, my job is going to end. What am I going to do?" And they're like, "Oh, yeah, yeah, we should figure that out."

This ambiguity arose again over the summer as Scott's second role was ending. Scott was offered an opportunity to stay at the institution in a role within residence life focusing on major projects but was not told about the new role until during move-in, when it was announced over the walkie-talkie system used for staff to communicate as students and families arrived on campus. Scott said, "The paperwork did eventually come, but it always felt a little skeptical or suspicious." Scott's feelings of suspicion were fueled by organizational ambivalence toward his needs.

Andrew and Anthony both experienced unclear timelines in their interim roles. Andrew was asked to step into the role of interim director of residence life at a large, public research-oriented urban institution in the Northeast when his supervisor was asked to become an interim associate vice president. Andrew explained,

that everything was kind of painted with the backdrop of you don't know whether or not in six months, five months, whatever it was going to be, if this was going to be the same, or if I was going to be going back and doing something different. And so I think that that uncertainty piece is what sticks out most in my mind throughout the entire thing.

Because Andrew moved into the interim director role when his supervisor moved into an interim associate vice president role, Andrew felt uncertainty regarding his role because his appointment as the permanent director was contingent on his supervisor being named permanent associate vice president.

Anthony too faced uncertainty with the timeline of his interim role. Anthony said, "I never knew when my interim was ending. I didn't know what was going to happen afterward." The resolution to Anthony's situation was also ambiguous. Anthony said, "I was that [interim director of advising] for seven months, and then they said, 'You're just the director of advising and first-year experience now.'" Anthony ended up retaining his former role as director of the first-year experience and absorbed the director of advising role that he was serving in on an interim basis. As such, Anthony took on two director roles after seven months of being interim.

When Darryl was named interim associate vice president at a large, urban public four-year research-intensive institution in the Northeast, he knew he was "auditioning" for the permanent role. After eight weeks, Darryl reported his vice president said to him,

"The campus knows you, you went around, you talked to all these people, you built relationships. People are working with you. I can already tell ... you are the guy that probably needs to do this job permanently, but I can't just put you into the position."

Darryl remained in the interim role for seven months until the search process began. He was in the role for nine months total before he was named the permanent associate vice president. Darryl offered how he felt at the time:

How do you look around and maybe that person's a person that can easily get promoted ... without a whole lot of issues, but I'm having to go through a search and deal with a whole bunch of things. I'm the guy, but am I? ... You're saying I'm the guy, but then I'm going through the motion[s]. ... Am I really that person? There was always this little bit of, it will never feel right until it actually is the case. ... Let me make sure I'm not doing anything to muck it up intentionally or unintentionally.

Ambiguity surrounded Darryl's role as associate vice president regarding the timeline and search process as he was sent mixed messages about his status and provided with little information on the length of the interim appointment.

"On Your Own"

At the time of Darryl's interview, he was serving as an interim vice president for student affairs. Darryl described his role as interim vice president as containing significant ambiguity. Darryl said,

There's a couple of curve balls I had to navigate really quickly and right away. I'm learning a lot about who listens to who, who are the [influential people] in my organization. Then, the other thing I would say is ... I'm trying to help people understand what a VP does in the same vein as I'm trying to learn how to be a VP myself. I'm literally building a plane as I'm flying it.

Cathy also noted there was a lack of training or preparation available to her for her interim role, and she explained there was little information provided to her at the beginning of the role regarding expectations or how she would receive feedback. The ambiguity surrounding the role required that Cathy execute the responsibilities of the role with a less-than-ideal understanding of the expectations and prepare for the potential that she would not transition to the permanent role at the end of her interim appointment. Cathy said,

It was like flying two different airplanes at the same time. I'm in the role a hundred ... percent, but then also, if this doesn't work out, how do I make sure that it's still in good shape for someone else to come in and take over?

Cathy had to ensure the "plane" that is the interim leadership role was flying and going in the right direction. The second "plane" for Cathy was to document her experience to prepare someone else to move into her role if she did not end up as the permanent dean.

While Anthony expressed confidence and comfortability with sitting in the uncertainty of his interim role, uncertainty existed from the beginning:

It is a weirdly complex life to be in, right? Because every day is a little bit different. You get named in [an] interim [role] and you're like, "All right, I'm the go-to for this now." But you aren't necessarily given the power to make any changes because you don't want to ruffle feathers as interim, especially if you are looking to then be named permanent. You are a sitting duck. And so you have this ability to either go full force and start acting like the director and hope that your supervisor is like, "All right, look at you taking initiative." Or you try to create the least amount of waves possible and just maintain the status quo.

Finally, Ashley, who served in an interim director role at a mid-sized, private university in the Midwest, described an "internal struggle" during which she used the notion of "fake it until you make it" as a strategy to mitigate a dichotomy she experienced in her interim role. Ashley explained,

People assume because you take the interim role, you already have a full handle on what the position is and what you're stepping into. And that was definitely not the fact ... it was just assumption that I knew those things. ... I feel like there's no onboarding process when you're an interim person. It's just like you have to prove yourself and you don't want to ask questions ... so it was, I would say a little bit of faking it until you make it type thing.

For these participants, navigating ambiguity meant having to proceed in a leadership role without a clear understanding of expectations, or having to decipher expectations and notions of how one is supposed to operate in the role from various campus constituents.

Leading with Intentionality

Most of the 12 participants in this study described ways in which they were intentional about their approach to their roles as interim leaders in student affairs. The participants described how they engaged in their work as leaders and the strategic approaches they took to their roles, given the specific context of their interim appointments. These dynamics and the contexts that shape these experiences will be explored in this section.

Taking Charge

Some participants described how they "owned the role." For these interim leaders in student affairs, the interim label did not hinder them. These interim leaders acted as if they were in the role on a permanent basis. For example, Sarah explained,

I think in an interim, where you're there for a certain amount of time, you can kind of be really honest. And I think at [the] senior level, executive levels, provosts, VPs, they want that honesty. They want to know what's wrong, what's not going right? What can I change? So I've enjoyed that. I joke sometimes I'm like, "Wow, I can say things that in my long-term job, would've got me fired."

For Sarah, interim roles are an opportunity to speak freely, identify areas of improvement, and articulate those concerns to leadership.

Despite Rita's overall negative experience with her role as interim dean of students, she was able to use the role to accomplish projects that were important to her and that were beneficial for the staff in her division. Rita referenced being able to get a staff compensation review that resulted in the student affairs staff receiving market adjustment raises. She noted this had not been done at the institution "in years." In this instance, Rita demonstrated a willingness to take charge, even in a negative environment for her personally, to help her staff.

As mentioned previously, Linda had to navigate organizational constraints around her ability to advocate for students. She was able to be intentional with how she navigated that constraint:

I did find ways to advocate for students and for student affairs colleagues. As I mentioned, I was brought in a handful of times to the senior leadership team space, and I was at all of the board meetings. I was able to leverage some of the existing relationships I had with other senior leaders to advocate for, just in a less direct way and in a more, honestly, more time-intensive way. ... I actually do feel that I was able to advocate.

Linda articulated an intentional desire to advocate for students and staff in the spaces where she had the opportunity, and in this way, she demonstrated taking charge. However, the structure of the organization created conditions in which Linda was advocating less effectively and consistently than she wanted.

"Push and Pull"

Some participants in this study described, as Darryl put it, a "push and pull" dichotomy in their roles:

On the one hand, I was doing the job and I had to figure out how to keep moving people forward and not simply be a caretaker, and yet, at the same time there was always this, "Well, what happens if I don't become permanent?" I'm kind of navigating this push and pull. I still got to move [the] department forward, but what happens if I'm navigating this momentum, [and] ultimately, [I'm] not the person?

Darryl recognized changes needed to be made in two of the functional areas he oversaw, housing and campus recreation. Darryl described the "push" to make needed changes but felt the "pull" of uncertainty regarding whether he would ultimately be the permanent associate vice president, and if not, what changes would mean for the organization long-term. While Darryl wanted to drive his units forward, he did not want to create a condition where, if he were not the permanent associate vice president, that change would be undone, setting the organization back.

Holding Back

Scott served in several interim roles in student affairs at his alma mater after he was let go from his director role in student affairs at a different institution. He felt that being an interim leader in

student affairs, under these circumstances, placed a strain on his ability to fully engage in his roles and speak his mind due to concerns related to his employment status. Scott articulated a hesitancy to speak freely and an intentional effort to “play nice” in order to preserve his employment and career progression. Budgetary constraints related to the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these concerns. Scott felt a “pressure to go with the flow” as an interim leader. Scott’s perspective is unique because he was the only participant to discuss holding back as the predominant way to enact their interim leadership role.

Separation

Some participants spoke about how they intentionally repressed the interim nature of their role while in the role. For example, Linda knew from when she was asked to serve as the interim SSAO that she would apply for the permanent role. In fact, she was encouraged to apply for the role by the president of the institution. As such, Linda had to decide how she would approach the role as both the interim and the candidate.

For an academic year, Linda occupied the unique and sometimes “awkward” position of being both the interim SSAO and a candidate for the permanent position. Linda explained she tried “to remove all the noise” that came with being the candidate and focus on what was right for students and staff. Linda said,

I think it felt very important to me that I'm not [making] decisions in the role because of how they might reflect on me as a candidate. That felt and does feel unethical, that I was holding that seat and that required of me to speak up in certain moments to share feedback that might not have been appreciated, to push back against things that senior leaders maybe wanted, these fellow senior leaders who I was almost level with, but not quite.

Linda was able to separate her role as interim SSAO and candidate by remaining authentic and acting with integrity. Linda said that she made conscious, intentional efforts not to allow her self-interest in the permanent role to impact how she led in the interim.

Cathy noted there was no time at her institution to stop and prepare for her interim role. The institutional context called for Cathy to hit the ground running from day one:

People saw me as a change agent. Here's this person who's being named, who's going to help a lot with enrollment goals and all of that. There's a new residence hall that we're building. Same thing. Having those things in place forced me to just step in and not look back because those pieces are moving ... and there's no time to figure out, are we doing this right? Are we doing this wrong? We just have to act.

Consequently, Cathy took the approach of acting in the role as if she were not the interim dean of students, but the permanent dean of students. Cathy explained her thought process around the interim title:

I don't remember who told me early on, but someone gave me the advice of owning the role, being the dean of students even with the interim title. Really, that's the philosophy

that I adopted. It was regardless of the outcome in six months, I'm in the role right now and I'm just going to own it.

The institutional context did not provide a choice for Cathy on whether she would be able to dwell on the fact that she was in an interim role. Cathy had no choice but to “own it” and dive into the work.

The Internal Experience

Finally, participants in this study described a range of emotions and intrapersonal states that characterized their experiences as interim leaders in student affairs. From self-doubt and imposter syndrome to empowerment, affirmation, and confidence, the experience of interim leadership in student affairs consisted of a wide range of internal experiences. The internal experience speaks to how participants felt at the time they were in their interim leadership roles.

Self-doubt and Imposter Syndrome

For some participants, serving as an interim leader in student affairs, at least at times, brought self-imposed questions about their ability to be successful in their interim role. Darryl offered this response when he was asked to serve as interim associate vice president: “I said, “Sir ... number one, thank you for thinking about me. Number two, “Why me? What is it about me that you think I can do this?”

As Ashley was trying to figure out her new role, others were offering their unsolicited feedback on her former supervisor and how they did not like how that person performed in the role. Ashley explained how she felt during this time:

I can't be vulnerable and I can't tell people how I'm feeling because now they're going to start judging me and think I'm not able to do this. Internally it's very lonely. You just feel very by yourself and isolated because externally you don't want to feel like the person that doesn't know what they were doing, or you don't want someone to feel like they made a mistake in giving you the opportunity.

The concern for Ashley was that she would be “found out” as an imposter or that someone would realize they had made a mistake by offering her the interim associate director role.

Empowerment, Affirmation, and Confidence

While some participants described feelings of self-doubt and imposter syndrome during their time as interim leaders in student affairs, other participants in this study described ways in which they felt empowered, affirmed, or gained confidence in themselves during their time in the role. For example, Anthony noted as he gained more responsibility in this interim role, he felt empowered to make decisions. He described the shift from being the one asking questions, to being the one answering questions:

It sort of threw me into that sort of life where I realized I wasn't asking my boss anymore, I was the one people were asking. And so that in itself, which has now been my trajectory into more senior administration, was the first time that that happened. And if I would've as an interim not been comfortable enough to make decisions ... I would've felt helpless.

Anthony's interim role was the first step in his ascent toward senior administration and contributed to his increased confidence in the process.

Linda felt a sense of affirmation, but in a different way and after the interim leadership role ended. Linda was a candidate for the permanent SSAO role but was not selected. While disappointed, Linda returned to her dean of students role at the same institution. Linda explained she now reports to the new SSAO and has a good relationship with them. Linda felt affirmed by the new leader recognizing her contributions and her time as interim SSAO:

What I appreciate in that is just her recognition that I can contribute significantly, still, to the leadership of the division, that I certainly have had some experiences that I think can be useful to her as she navigates a new institution and the politics and all the dynamics there.

Some of the participants also discussed the unique ways confidence was a part of their individual experience. Scott noted the interim roles he occupied were an opportunity for "confidence rebuilding." Scott entered his first interim role shortly after experiencing a separation from a different institution. For Scott, entering the interim role was an opportunity for him to regain confidence that was lost in the experience of the job separation.

Discussion

The findings of this study, the five component parts and their manifestations, paint a complex portrait of interim leadership in student affairs. The findings offer a window into the phenomenon as it was experienced by the 12 participants. It is not surprising that navigating interpersonal relationships emerged as a significant component of the experience of interim leadership in student affairs for the participants in this study. Relationships have become a major component of the contemporary understanding of leadership theory and practice (Kezar et al., 2006). In the student affairs context, the ability to build and maintain relationships is critical (Kuk & Banning, 2016; Roper, 2002; Smith et al., 2009).

In addition to navigating interpersonal relationships, participants in this study described the various ways in which they navigated the organization, that is the student affairs unit or the institution. As Kuk and Banning (2016) posit, "Leadership behavior is a function of the leader's attributes in a dynamic, reciprocal, and transactional relationship with the contextual components of the environment of the leadership" (p. 23). The findings of this study highlight the importance of the environment in which a particular leader is situated. In the context of interim leadership, the participants discussed navigating organizational transitions, compensation, and exploitation.

Compensation was discussed by several of the participants as being a significant component of their experience. While individuals choose to enter the field of student affairs for a variety of reasons (Taub & McEwen, 2006), the field is not known for providing the same level of compensation as the

private sector or other fields where advanced degrees are often required. Lack of satisfaction with compensation can lead to professionals leaving the field (Marshall et al., 2016). Further, it is unusual for an institution to have standardized policies and practices regarding the compensation of interim leaders (Huff & Neubrander, 2015). Several participants in this study described not only receiving compensation in their interim role they felt was not commensurate with their role or experience, but also experiencing challenges related to communication, transparency, and the treatment they received from the organization and their superiors.

Several participants had their workloads increased when they took on an interim role. Some participants also discussed how their previous role was not filled when they took on a new role, leading them to essentially occupy two jobs at the same time. This experience is consistent with Boerner's (2010) findings. Research in student affairs has found the quality of one's experiences at work is an important component of personal well-being (Chessman, 2021). Consequently, working long hours or feeling unappreciated at work in student affairs can result in professionals leaving the field (Marshall et al., 2016). Results from this study indicate that much more work can be done to address unsustainable workloads in student affairs.

Consistent with previous dissertation research, participants in this study described a component of the experience of interim leadership in student affairs as comprising ambiguity and uncertainty (Boerner, 2010; Boulay, 2022; Ondercin, 2009; Roybal, 2022). For the participants in this study, ambiguity emerged regarding the timeline of their role and the nature of the role itself. The participants discussed a lack of training, a lack of institutional knowledge held by themselves and others to rely on, and uncertainty regarding their ability to make meaningful decisions.

Despite the ambiguity they faced, participants described the ways in which they were intentional and strategic in how they performed in the role. This component speaks to the leadership behavior of the participants in this study. Whether a participant described taking charge, taking a balanced approach, or holding back, the rationale for the approach they took was often aligned with their understanding of leadership, but also intentional given the context, organizational dynamics, and situation. Consistent with the ecological model of student affairs leadership, the participants recognized various environmental and organizational dynamics that informed how they chose to enact leadership (Kuk & Banning, 2016).

The final component of interim leadership in student affairs described by the participants in this study is the internal experience. In this study, some participants described feelings of self-doubt and imposter syndrome during their time as interim leaders in student affairs. Previous dissertation research has identified feelings of self-doubt or imposter syndrome as being a component of the interim leadership experience in student affairs (Boerner, 2010; Roybal, 2022). However, several participants in this study also described feeling empowered, affirmed, or gaining confidence in themselves during the time they were interim leaders in student affairs. Consistent with findings from other work (Boerner, 2010; Boulay, 2022; Nelson, 2020), this study found that the interim leadership experience in student affairs served as an opportunity for participants to feel empowered and affirmed when taking on new responsibilities, and to gain confidence in their ability to perform in their interim role.

Implications

Implications for Practice

Future interim leaders in student affairs should be prepared to build new relationships, experience changing relationships, and feel the impact of their predecessor on their new role. Before accepting an interim leadership role in student affairs, individuals should seek to outline and establish compensation, workload expectations, and goals with their supervisor. Future interim leaders in student affairs are advised to seek clarity prior to accepting an interim role regarding the expected timeline and the specifics of the role. However, future interim leaders should recognize that even when clarity or expectations are provided at the outset, they may change over time. Interim leaders should seek ongoing updates from their supervisor regarding the timeline of the role, their status in the role, and the expectations and responsibilities of the role.

Supervisors should provide as much clarity as possible regarding how long the interim role will last, the compensation for the interim leader, and the expectations for the interim leader during their time in the role. Supervisors should work with the interim leader to create clear goals and expectations for the role and provide onboarding and training for areas that are not familiar to the interim leader, especially if the interim leader is external to the institution. Supervisors should not assume the person entering the interim role knows everything about how to perform the role, or that they were provided with the adequate materials to take over the role by the person who vacated it.

Additionally, supervisors should make clear to the interim leader their expectations for the role that was vacated by the interim leader. Supervisors should encourage interim leaders to consider how the work of the role they vacated will be either redistributed or modified to keep their workload manageable if the role they vacated is not being filled. Supervisors should also provide ongoing status updates to the interim leader regarding their performance in the role, the timeline of the search process for the permanent role, and if there are changes to their expectations regarding the responsibilities of the role.

Organizations can work to address some of the challenges articulated by participants in this study by instituting equitable timelines, compensation, and workload guidelines for interim leaders (Huff & Neubrandner, 2015). While each situation is different, organizations should provide some parameters around how long one can serve in an interim role, how one's compensation is determined in an interim role, and the workload of an interim leader. Without such guidelines, there exists the possibility for interim leaders in student affairs to be used as cost-effective labor. Organizations should carefully examine their current policies and practices to ensure staff are not being exploited through the use of interim leaders and staff.

For peers and the staff of an interim leader, there are several implications derived from the findings of this study that can provide greater understanding and context to what an interim leader in student affairs may be experiencing. Peers should recognize that interim leaders are often working to establish and redefine relationships. Peers can serve as a source of support and guidance for the interim leader, and when appropriate, offer affirmation and acceptance of their new leadership

role. Staff can recognize that interim leaders are often navigating ambiguity and discovering new things about themselves, their peers, and their organizations. These changes inherently disrupt the status quo. Staff can support their interim leader by recognizing the challenges they are facing as they navigate an ambiguous and evolving environment.

Implications for Research

This study has opened up many new areas of research at both the individual and organizational levels. Future quantitative work can build on Huff and Neubrandner's (2015) study to better understand the landscape of interim leadership in student affairs regarding the prevalence, appointment length, and compensation practices. Additionally, future work could explore outcomes, such as whether interim leaders are more likely to be named to the permanent position, or intrapersonal outcomes such as self-confidence and career satisfaction. Quantitative work could also explore if there is a relationship between the use of interim leaders in student affairs and measures of organizational health such as employee satisfaction and employee retention.

Future qualitative work can build upon this study by expanding the sample parameters to include a greater diversity of participants. Additionally, the inclusion of supervisors and staff perceptions of interim leadership in student affairs would give a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Future work could also attempt to elucidate the nuances of interim leadership with more specificity by including a reference group of non-interim leaders or specifically asking participants to reflect on non-interim leadership experiences and how those experiences differed from their time as interim leaders. This study also raises implications for the incorporation of new leadership paradigms in the study of student affairs, such as destructive and toxic leadership, unfortunate but necessary paradigms to understand the full spectrum of leadership behavior in higher education (Klaus & Steele, 2022; Smith & Fredricks-Lowman, 2020).

Beyond the scope of interim leadership in student affairs, this study has demonstrated the power of hermeneutic phenomenology in the study of leadership. Future work can use this methodology to understand the manifestations of the lived experience of leadership in other contexts, both within and outside of higher education. This study also highlights the need for additional organizational analyses of student affairs units within higher education. Future work should incorporate the organization as a unit of analysis beyond an individual leader.

Conclusion

The use of interim leaders in student affairs is a common, yet poorly understood practice. This qualitative study in the hermeneutic phenomenological tradition has provided greater insight into the phenomenon of interim leadership in student affairs. The findings offer an in-depth portrait of the experience of interim leadership in student affairs for 12 leaders in the field. The findings provide a framework for improved practice by offering implications for how the practice of interim leadership is enacted. Further, the experiences of the participants presented here can serve as a call for senior student affairs officers to assess the status of their organization, not just in the context of interim leadership, but in the overall enterprise to support and cultivate student learning, growth, development, and well-being.

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HERS: A Nonprofit's Journey from University Sponsorship to PEO

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Higher Education Resource Services (HERS)

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Your Part-Time Controller (YPTC)

Abstract

HERS (Higher Education Resource Services), a higher education nonprofit organization, has been affiliated with, or a sponsored project of, a college or university since its inception in 1972. Its most recent and longest-standing affiliation with the University of Denver (DU) was established in 1983.

This article documents the process of HERS ending its affiliation with DU and employing the services of a Professional Employer Organization (PEO). Lessons learned and best practices are shared about the PEO selection process for higher education administrators.

Keywords: HERS (Higher Education Resource Services), Higher Education Nonprofit, Professional Employer Organizations (PEOs), Outsourcing Human Resources (HR)

Introduction

This article examines a significant organizational transition at HERS (Higher Education Resource Services), a nonprofit organization dedicated to leadership development for professionals in higher education. Since its founding in 1972, HERS has maintained affiliations with various higher education institutions, including Brown University, the University of Pennsylvania, Bryn Mawr College, Wellesley College, and the University of Denver (DU). Its longest-standing partnership, with DU, began in 1983.

This article details HERS' separation from DU, which took effect on July 1, 2024, under mutually agreed-upon terms. The transition process provided valuable insights, many of which have broader implications for college and university administrators. The following sections document these lessons and offer best practices for institutions considering similar transitions.

Relevance to Higher Education Administrators

The complexity of HERS' transition underscores the challenges institutions face when shifting human resources (HR) and payroll services to external providers. A structured guide for selecting a Professional Employer Organization (PEO) and managing employee retirement accounts could have streamlined the process. While this article does not serve as a step-by-step manual, it presents key insights from Thomas and Jordan, whose experiences may inform administrators tasked with

optimizing HR, payroll, and compliance functions—especially for remote employees residing in states outside the institution’s primary location.

For small colleges, outsourcing HR and payroll services may be more cost-effective than maintaining in-house staff. Chief financial officers (CFOs) and chief human resource officers (CHROs) often oversee these functions. Utilizing a PEO can simplify remote work policies, facilitate multi-state hiring, and potentially reduce administrative costs while maintaining compliance. Furthermore, institutions that partially or fully transition to a PEO model may improve employee satisfaction, enhance retention, and expand talent recruitment opportunities.

HERS and Its Separation from DU

HERS is a leadership development and research organization committed to fostering a network of women and gender-diverse leaders in higher education. While historically serving this demographic, in 2022, HERS expanded its programs to leaders of all genders who align with its mission.

Founded in 1972 by the Committee of Concerned Women, HERS initially operated from Brown University under the leadership of Lilli Hornig. In 1975, Cynthia Secor was appointed Executive Director of HERS Mid-Atlantic, leading the organization for over 30 years. For a period, HERS operated as two regional chapters—HERS New England and HERS Mid-Atlantic—before Secor consolidated them into a national entity, relocating its headquarters to Denver in 1983.

Through its affiliation with DU, HERS secured office and storage space on campus, with staff classified as DU employees. This arrangement granted HERS’ employees access to DU’s HR and payroll services, as well as benefits such as an 8% retirement match through TIAA, tuition remission for themselves and their families, discounted childcare, and free regional public transportation. These benefits remained in place until HERS’ separation from DU in 2024.

The decision to separate was driven by multiple factors. While the HERS Board of Directors had considered the transition in previous years, leadership changes and the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic delayed action. When the issue resurfaced in 2022, both HERS and DU mutually agreed to part ways.

In January 2023, the HERS Board of Directors approved proceeding with the organization’s separation from DU, providing President Gloria Thomas and Paulina Jordan with a one-year timeline to implement the transition. Jordan, a manager at Your Part-Time Controller (YPTC) and an associate responsible for overseeing HERS’ financial operations, played a pivotal role in facilitating this process. Their primary objective was to identify a suitable organization capable of assuming responsibility for HERS’ human resources, payroll administration, regulatory compliance, and retirement savings management—functions that DU had provided for the organization over the previous four decades.

Initially, the task appeared formidable. The first step was to consult peer organizations, particularly those that had previously transitioned away from university affiliations. A senior DU leader connected Thomas with a nonprofit that had recently undergone a similar separation. This initial conversation led to a series of discussions with other nonprofit leaders, forming a network of

shared knowledge. Some of these organizations were higher education-affiliated, while others were not. Additionally, Jordan utilized YPTC's resources to research potential PEO solutions.

Through more than a dozen consultations, HERS compiled a list of recommended PEOs capable of providing HR, payroll, compliance, and retirement recordkeeping services through strategic partnerships. The subsequent challenge lay in selecting the provider best suited to HERS' needs.

Steps Taken

While researching potential PEOs for HERS, the authors discovered the National Association of Professional Employer Organizations (NAPEO) website, which had not been previously mentioned. NAPEO.org serves as a valuable resource, listing PEOs by state and highlighting those specializing in nonprofits and small businesses.

While the NAPEO website was a valuable resource, HERS sought more personalized guidance in selecting a PEO. Although NAPEO lists PEO brokers, HERS ultimately found a broker through an independent Google search. The broker's services, funded by the PEO upon contract signing, were free to HERS.

The broker proved highly beneficial, assessing HERS' needs based on size and budget and providing a curated list of PEOs. Some had already been interviewed, while others were new. The broker's insight was particularly useful in narrowing down options.

HERS selected "PEO 323" (a pseudonym) for its responsiveness, competitive benefits, and strong retirement plan partnerships. The firm's robust staffing ensured prompt customer service, and its user-friendly online platform integrated seamlessly with HERS' accounting system, automating payroll journal entries. Additionally, its administrative costs aligned with HERS' budget.

With so many PEOs available, thorough research and interviews are essential to finding the right fit. While HERS has been with PEO 323 for less than a year, the long-term financial impact remains uncertain despite assurances of minimal annual cost increases. Throughout this transition, HERS gained valuable insights that can benefit other organizations considering a similar shift.

Lessons Learned

- **Effective Communication is Key:** Moving from DU to an unfamiliar PEO required a clear communication plan. Employees and stakeholders needed to understand both the benefits and potential downsides, such as unexpected out-of-pocket costs.
- **Manage Expectations:** Employers should avoid making promises about the transition, as some uncertainties are inevitable. Not all questions can be anticipated, and the PEO may not have immediate answers.
- **Define Organizational Needs:** A perfect PEO may not exist, so organizations should identify their priorities. If an in-house HR professional is in place, a PEO might only be needed for payroll processing. Consider factors like timekeeping, applicant tracking, integration with accounting software, and user-based versus service-based pricing.

- **Prepare for Financial Liabilities:** Upon separating from DU, HERS had to pay out all accumulated employee vacation time. While this liability had been tracked, the financial burden of paying it all at once required planning.
- **Establish New Policies and Documentation:** Leaving DU meant HERS had to create its own employee handbook. While some DU policies were retained, new ones were developed to reflect HERS' evolving needs.
- **Address IT and Software Transitions:** Shifting from DU's IT infrastructure to HERS' own systems required planning. Employees lost access to DU email, so archiving important messages was necessary. DU-installed software had to be removed from all devices.
- **Plan for Onboarding Logistics:** Since HERS' employees became new hires under PEO 323, onboarding was required. However, PEO 323 did not communicate the need for all employees to be available, causing issues when some were on vacation and unable to complete required forms on time.
- **Expect Implementation Challenges:** Even with thorough preparation, no transition is seamless. HERS faced unexpected difficulties, including unclear next steps and a lack of designated points of contact. While the relationship with PEO 323 improved after onboarding, initial frustrations caused moments of buyer's remorse.
- **Maintain Open Communication with the PEO:** Some hidden costs, such as higher out-of-pocket healthcare expenses, emerged post-transition. HERS' leadership is now working with PEO 323 to explore more affordable health plan options. Ongoing communication is critical to ensuring employee satisfaction and optimizing benefits.

Best Practices

To ensure a smooth transition to a PEO, three best practices stand out:

Seek Legal Guidance – Legal expertise is essential throughout the process. While in-house counsel can assist, HERS relied on outside legal counsel to navigate its separation from DU. Though not involved in PEO selection, legal counsel played a key role in negotiations and drafted the official resolution documenting the transition.

Leverage Your Network – Gathering insights from other organizations and consulting experts like YPTC can help assess PEO options effectively. Learning from others' experiences ensured HERS found the best fit.

Avoid Making Promises – Transitioning to a PEO comes with uncertainties, particularly regarding benefits and costs. Instead of guaranteeing improvements, communicate goals and acknowledge potential unknowns to manage expectations.

Closing

For institutions looking to cut costs, a PEO can provide HR, payroll, and compliance services at potentially lower costs than traditional in-house models. Unlike fixed-percentage benefits costs at many higher education institutions, PEO pricing is based on actual services used, offering possible savings. Additionally, PEOs can supplement campus HR teams, particularly for managing out-of-state employees.

PEOs can be transformative, especially for small colleges. Careful evaluation is key—understand the steps involved and vet PEOs thoroughly to find the right fit.

More Than a Paycheck: The Value of a College Degree

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Abstract

Unprecedented growth in college costs and associated student debt has fueled national interest in return on investment (ROI) in higher education. Multiple ROI calculators and ratings have been created to determine if future earnings make the cost of college worth it. Although these earnings-based return assessments are methodologically appealing with a straightforward, quantifiable metric, the concept of ROI in higher education is much more complex. Measuring the value of college as earnings ignores all other gains from higher education of which there are many. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the benefits of college to both the individual and society. We encourage leaders in higher education to be familiar with the reasons why evaluating schools and programs based simply on wage data can be misleading. We also encourage prospective students and their families to keep these benefits in mind as they evaluate the costs associated with college.

Keywords: Return on investment, higher education, value of education, colleges and universities, economics of education, cost of education, literature review, benefits of higher education, benefits of college, nonpecuniary returns

Introduction

No one doubts that a person with a college degree earns more, on average, than a person with a high school diploma. However, unprecedented growth in the cost of a college degree and associated student debt has fueled national interest in return on investment (ROI) in higher education. The question of whether the benefits of a college degree are worth the cost is being asked not just by prospective students and their families but also by higher education experts and political leaders at both the state and national levels. For example, the Inter-University Council of Ohio enlisted a labor market analytics company to assess the economic impact and return on investment for students graduating from the public universities of Ohio (Lightcast, 2023) and a bill enacted by the Colorado General Assembly requires the Colorado Department of Higher Education to prepare an annual return-on-investment report of undergraduate degree and certificate programs offered at each state institution of higher education (McKennie & Gladych, 2023). The U.S. Department of Education added earnings data for graduates to its College Scorecard in 2015 and program-level average wage data in 2020 (Bleemer, 2023). And in late 2023, the U.S. Department of Education adopted new Financial Value Transparency (FVT) reporting and disclosure requirements for nearly all programs at higher education institutions and reinstated a Gainful Employment (GE) accountability framework (Tarnow & Pheasant, 2024). The FVT/GE regulations

aim to provide detailed information about college costs and expected financial outcomes and to ensure career-training programs offer sufficient financial value. The first reporting deadline was October 1, 2024 (Federal Student Aid, 2024) subsequently extended to January 15, 2025 (Lee, Carey, & Noonan, 2025). As of early 2025, technical issues have created challenges for institutions submitting data and the fate of the regulations under the new Trump administration remain unclear (Lee et al., 2025).

With all the data now available to the public related to the economic outcomes of higher education, it is not surprising that multiple ROI calculators and ratings have been created. Think tanks and educational research organizations have devised often complex methodologies to determine if future earnings make the cost of college worth it. Examples are Degreechoices.com, Third Way, The Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, Bipartisan Policy Center, and Postsecondary Value Commission. There are variations on how each of these organizations determines ROI, but they typically focus on either the value of lifetime earnings by college degree recipients minus the cost of college (e.g., Cooper, 2021) or pay comparisons between college goers and individuals with high school diplomas (e.g., Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2022). Some of these studies add pay corrections by comparing students from the same state (e.g., Brown, 2022) or accounting for expected pay discrimination against women and underrepresented minorities (Miller & Akabas, 2022).

Academic journals and popular press, too, often equate the value of higher education with earnings when asking, “Is college worth it?” (e.g., Bollig, 2015; Friedman, 2019; Svrluga, 2019; Wippman & Altschuler, 2024). Earnings-based return assessments are methodologically appealing with a straightforward, quantifiable metric; however, the concept is much more complex (Martinez, 2021). With any estimate, assumptions are necessary but can alter the outcomes. For example, assuming that all workers are continuously employed may overestimate earnings (Vandenbroucke, 2023). Measuring the benefit of higher education as earnings ignores all other gains from higher education (Wolla et al., 2023). One purpose of this paper is to highlight different perspectives on the value of a college education. This research track is broad and deep, covering neuroscience to economics and reaching back many decades. From the user perspective, surveys of students and their parents indicate that neither group highlight pay premiums in their higher education decisions. We conclude our review by linking broad concepts of the value of higher education back to monetary estimates which yield dollar values that go well beyond a paycheck.

Exploring the Benefits of Higher Education

The case for including benefits of higher education beyond earnings has been consistently reinforced over several decades, by multiple disciplines. More than 30 years ago, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) conducted an exhaustive review of the literature on how college affects students, while in school and beyond. Subsequently, McMahon (2009, 2021), Oreopoulos and Salvanes (2009, 2011), Hout (2011), Oreopoulos and Petronijevic (2013), Barrow and Malamud (2015), Chan (2016), and Zajacova and Lawrence (2018) have also reviewed the literature. Some findings from these reviews are provided in Table 1. Each year, the College Board publishes a paper reviewing data related to the benefits of higher education for individuals and society as part of its “Trends in Higher

Education” series. Observations from the most recent paper in this series (Ma & Pender, 2023) are also referenced in Table 1.

Table 1
Impact of College Attendance on Individuals, Their Children, and Society

Category of influence	Specific effect	Literature review authors
Job-related benefits	Higher labor force participation rates; jobs that offer greater sense of accomplishment, autonomy, opportunities for creativity, social interaction, recognition, support, prestige/status, and satisfaction.	Chan (2016); Hout (2011); Ma & Pender (2023); McMahon (2009); Oreopoulos & Petronijevic (2013); Oreopoulos & Salvanes (2009)
Attitudes & values	Increase in aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual values as well as value placed on human rights and civic participation; decrease in traditional views of gender roles and greater appreciation of diversity.	Chan (2016); McMahon (2009); Oreopoulos & Salvanes (2009, 2011); Pascarella & Terenzini (1991)
Psychosocial changes	Increase in social skills and interpersonal relations, self-concept, autonomy, independence, personal adjustment, and psychological well-being; decrease in authoritarianism and egocentrism.	Oreopoulos & Salvanes (2009); Pascarella & Terenzini (1991)
Learning & cognition	Increase in specific subject matter knowledge, general verbal and quantitative skills, written and oral communication skills, formal reasoning, critical thinking; ability to utilize new knowledge and adapt to new technologies.	Chan (2016); McMahon (2009); Oreopoulos & Salvanes (2009); Pascarella & Terenzini (1991)
Quality of life	Better health, life expectancy, and consumer decision-making; greater self-reported happiness, savings and investment efficiency, household management and efficiency, marital satisfaction, and personal/professional mobility; lower rates of poverty.	Barrow & Malamud (2015); Chan (2016); Hout (2011); Ma & Pender (2023); McMahon (2009, 2021); Oreopoulos & Salvanes (2009,2011); Pascarella & Terenzini (1991); Zajacova & Lawrence (2018)
Intergenerational effects	Better health and educational attainment of children; children more likely to engage in a variety of educational activities (e.g., visiting libraries, art galleries, museums, or historical sites).	Barrow & Malamud (2015); Ma & Pender (2023); McMahon (2009); Pascarella & Terenzini (1991)
Benefits to society	Lower crime rates, welfare, medical and prison costs for states; higher payback for states in the form of sales, property, and state income taxes; social cohesion; increased charitable giving and community service; and higher rates of voting and volunteerism.	Chan (2016); Hout (2011); Ma & Pender (2023); McMahon (2009, 2021)

Research in Education and Neuroscience

Research in education and neuroscience corroborates these positive outcomes of higher education. Several research studies have shown a link between higher educational attainment and better cognitive functioning later in life and a reduced risk for dementia (National Institute on Aging, 2020). For example, research by Guerra-Carrillo, et al. (2017) finds that higher levels of attainment postpone cognitive decline, specifically for higher-level cognitive function such as reasoning. Why might this be the case? The authors suggest that learning in higher education influences cognition “consistent with principles of experience-dependent brain plasticity, from which one would predict improvements in cognitive skills that are repeatedly taxed in demanding and cognitively engaging coursework” (p. 2). Experience-dependent brain plasticity refers to the way brains are shaped by an individual’s unique experiences (McLaughlin et al., 2018). The brain is much more “plastic” early in life, but changes in brain structure and function continue even into the emerging adulthood years (defined as ages 18 to 25, see Arnett, 2000). Structurally, both postmortem and comparative studies reveal that myelination, pruning of synapses, and formation of new neuronal connections occur in early adulthood (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Guyer et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2009; Prigge & Kay, 2018). The areas of the brain in which these structural changes predominantly occur support “executive and emotional processes important for the transition to adulthood, particularly social-emotional behavior” (Taber-Thomas & Perez-Edgar, 2015, p. 129). And these changes do not occur in isolation. Cultural neuroscience research on neuroplasticity provides evidence that the brain fine tunes itself during emerging adulthood, at least in part, due to specific environmental circumstances faced by individuals.

Those parts of the brain most amenable to changes in response to environmental circumstances in late adolescence and early adulthood are those involved in executive functions, such as selective attention and focus, decision-making, voluntary response inhibition, cognitive flexibility, and working memory (Diamond, 2013; Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006) as well as social-cognitive processes such as self-awareness, theory of mind, emotional regulation, and making sense of complex social experiences (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Guyer et al., 2018). Thus, the college environment provides an incubator or “foundation for social and emotional development and psychological maturation” (Castro & Clyde, 2018, para. 5). In fact, Klafter (2020) has posited that the “real purpose of undergraduate education is the maturation of students rather than the transfer of knowledge” (p. 34).

In the language of developmental psychology, one might say that college provides “scaffolding” (Wood, et al., 1976) for the development of critical thinking, one of the primary goals of higher education (Wass, et al., 2011). According to cognitive developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), the critical thinking that students acquire will be applied not only in the original environment but also in their personal lives and will help them make meaning in other circumstances (Ismail, 2023). Thus, the cognitive and social maturation that occurs during the college years can be tied to better decision-making throughout life, leading to many of the positive benefits associated with higher education.

Survey Results

The results of several recent surveys indicate that most Americans believe a college education is important, whether they have a college degree or not, and among those with college degrees, that the cost is worth it (Kelderman, 2023; Nguyen, et al., 2023; Nicola, 2023). Most respondents to New America’s annual survey on higher education (Nguyen, et al., 2023) believed not only that individuals with undergraduate credentials earned more and enjoyed greater financial stability but also that they contribute to greater civic engagement, lower unemployment rates, and better public health within their communities. In response to a survey by the Chronicle of Higher Education (Kelderman, 2023), respondents pointed out, in open-ended comments, the benefits of college beyond good jobs. Sample comments were: “College also exposes you to people different from where you grew up It helps you figure out who you are and who you want to be,” and “Achieving a bachelor’s degree demonstrates the ability to set and achieve goals ... to persevere toward goals, to manage your time productively, to work with teams and to face and overcome problems” (para. 14).

Other survey results help clarify the distinction between a “good job” and a high-paying job. Over 80% of high school responders to an ACT survey considered education as their path to getting good jobs (Schiel, 2023). In a survey of parents of 5th to 12th graders, parents rated *getting a good job* as the top reason for their children to go to college (Inside Higher Ed, 2013). Neither students nor parents prioritized quantity of pay but rather the quality of work. According to a 2014 Gallup Survey, great jobs focus on multiple aspects of well-being, including social, financial, and physical well-being (Gallup, 2014). Nearly 10 years later, Ton (2023), an operations management researcher, described good jobs as ones that fulfill basic needs, including pay sufficient for financial autonomy, stable schedules, safe and secure work environments, and higher-order needs, including meaningfulness, autonomy, respect, and dignity. Collapsing the goal of higher education to pay oversimplifies the objectives of degree-seekers who want good jobs. When considering employment goals, students and parents look beyond the dollar and consider higher-level attributes of employment.

Show Me the Money

To link broader benefits of higher education back to dollar metrics of ROIs, McMahon (2021), an educational economist, estimated college degree premium (additional pay for a college graduate over that earned by a high school graduate) was worth \$32,102 per year in 2016; that would be \$42,105 in 2024 dollars. His estimate for the dollar value for private non-market benefits was \$50,176 in 2016 dollars, which is \$65,810 in 2024 dollars. Recall that the primary non-market benefits of higher education include improved health outcomes, greater happiness, improved efficiency in household management, appreciation for lifelong learning, higher labor force participation rates, better decision-making, and lower unemployment (Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2011; Nietzel, 2019). In total, the individual benefits accumulate to \$82,278 in 2016 dollars or \$107,915 in 2024 dollars; the wage premium is only 39% of those individual benefits. McMahon then extends his estimate of the value of higher education to the monetary estimated gains to society including functioning civil institutions, lower poverty, lower crime rates, higher tax revenue, environmental benefits, and positive wage gains for others. The value to society of a college

graduate in McMahon's calculations was \$77,123 in 2016 dollars and would be \$101,154 in 2024 dollars. The social gains of higher education are estimated to be nearly as large as the gains to an individual. Adding wage premiums, private nonpecuniary benefits, and social benefits results in a total \$159,401 in 2016 dollars and \$209,069 in 2024 dollars, a far cry from \$32,102 (2016) or \$42,105 (2024). By McMahon's estimates, a focus on pay misses 80% of the value of higher education.

Conclusion

It would behoove national and state leaders, especially those in higher education, to be familiar with the reasons why evaluating schools and programs based simply on wage data can be misleading and potentially harmful. For nearly seventy years, management experts have warned that returns on investment are insufficient as a measure of performance (Newman & Logan, 1955) and that multiple criteria are necessary for effective evaluation (Drucker, 1954). When singular criteria are used, resources are aligned to achieve whichever outcomes are measured (Argyris, 1952; Granick, 1954) which paradoxically result in organizations chasing the metrics rather than strategic goals (Keller and Price, 2011; Barnett, 2015). The bottom line is that a narrow definition of ROI that includes only individual earnings significantly underestimates the value of a college degree. As Orphan and McClure (2022) argue, a more expansive view of value is needed that ensures institutions "are not subject to systematic underinvestment that ignores their broader contributions" (p. 31).

Levy and Graff (2023), too, advise taking ROI rankings with a grain of salt as "... a lifetime ROI analysis has, at best, a tenuous relationship with any student's reality. The further from the beginning of a career you look, the more variables, life experiences, choices, opportunities, failures, and change events impact earning potential in ways that cannot be measured." There is also the satisfaction that comes with choosing a college and a major based on one's strengths and interests rather than average wage-by-major statistics (Bleemer, 2023); that is, choosing with one's heart and not one's wallet (Morrison, 2019).

Prospective students and their families should be encouraged to evaluate the costs associated with a college and ways that cost might be offset; at the same time, however, they should also be aware that colleges and universities are in the business of turning out culturally literate, critically thinking, and socially skilled individuals and that these attributes of a college-educated person provide a quality of life that goes far beyond a paycheck. As W.E.B. DuBois (1973) stated: "There could be no education that was not at once for use in earning a living and for use in living a life" (p. 84).

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University Policies and Supports for Online Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

Online education options, both remote and hybrid, are continuing to grow worldwide at institutes of higher education. Due to this increase in course offerings, there has been extensive research focused on the implementation of effective online learning environments in specific academic programs or departments, but there has been little focus on university governance necessary to support it. To address this need, the current paper aims to introduce an overall framework for higher education institutional policy that supports online learning for faculty and students and provides guidelines for course design and allows for continued improvement.

Keywords: online learning, university policies, institutional policies

Introduction

Over the past two decades, online learning in higher education has grown in popularity to meet student learning needs and address the lack of physical space at institutes of higher education (IHE; Panigrahi et al., 2018). Due to the global pandemic in 2020, online learning was catapulted to the forefront of teaching and learning, prompting IHEs to rapidly shift to online delivery of coursework, including supporting students and providing access to resources (Taylor et al., 2020). Since that time, there has been a great deal of research focused on the implementation of effective online learning environments related to academic departments, but the important topic of university governance necessary to support online learning has received little focus (or attention).

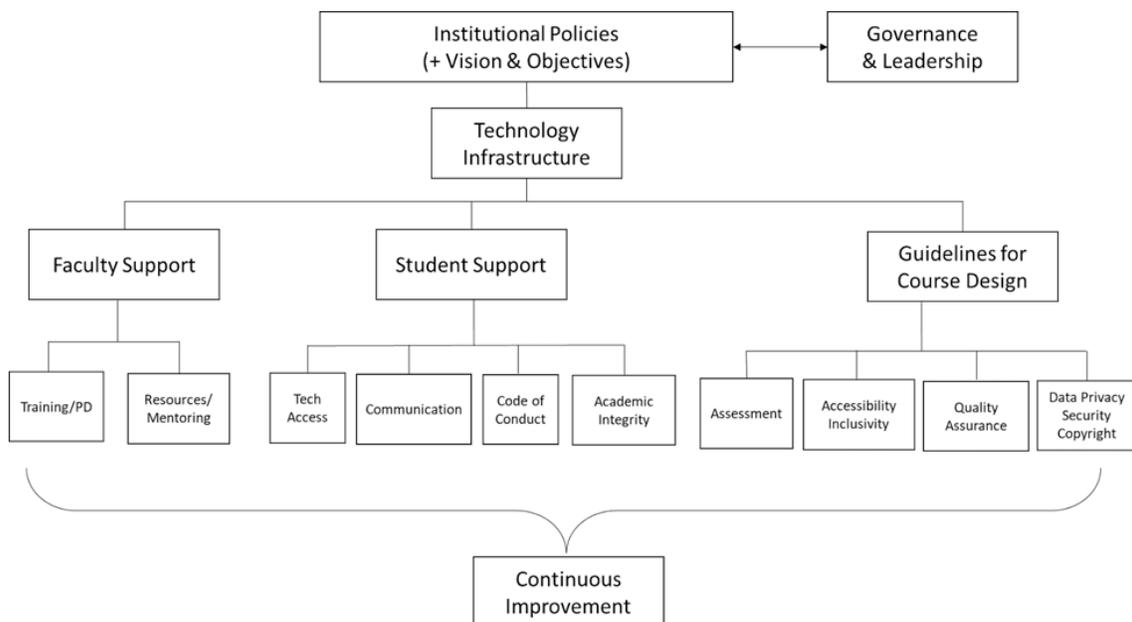
Evaluation of effective online learning is often focused on actions related to the “teaching” aspect of implementation (e.g., student outcomes, online pedagogy, faculty preparedness); which falls within the purview of the academic departments. However, IHEs governance and commitment to online learning are also needed for positive outcomes and ensuring an ethical environment (Jensen,

2019). There needs to be larger system level policies from the IHE to support departments in implementation of online teaching and learning (Mishra et al., 2020).

Martin et al. (2020) created a framework for research themes, related to online learning, classified in levels that all influence each other. These levels include organization (institutional policies, culture, leadership, policy, and management), course and instructor (course facilitation, assessment, evaluation, design, development), and learner (characteristics, outcomes, engagement). Historically, themes related to course, instructor, and learner were researched at the highest levels, where themes related to course organization were focused on the least. Due to the low percentage of studies focusing on organization domains, papers related to this topic were identified as an area of need. To address the support needed for effective online learning to take place, this paper aims to introduce a framework for higher education institutional policy that supports online learning for faculty and students and provides guidelines for course design and allows for continued improvement. To do this, we will first describe a brief overview of each section of the *Framework for Reviewing and Analyzing University Policies and Supports for Online Teaching & Learning* (Figure 1) and then go into more detail about each section of the framework with supporting literature. The first step in the framework is focused on *Governance and Leadership*. It is critical to establish a designated committee responsible for overseeing policies and online teaching and learning, as well as define the roles and responsibilities of faculty, administrators, and support staff involved in online education. This will help to ensure effective leadership and decision-making for the online learning program. Through collaborative governance and leadership, institutional policies can be created.

Figure 1

Framework for Reviewing and Analyzing University Policies and Supports for Online Teaching & Learning



After the policies are created that include the vision and objectives for online teaching and learning, the *Technology Infrastructure* needs to be addressed. This ensures the institution has a sufficient technical infrastructure to support online teaching and learning. Institutions need to provide ongoing technical support for faculty and students and regularly update and maintain online learning platforms and tools.

As the *Technology Infrastructure* is being addressed, it is important to review *Faculty Support*, *Student Support* and the specific *Guidelines for Course Design*. To support faculty, a key component for IHEs, is offering training and professional development opportunities to enhance online teaching skills. The second key element is to offer resources (e.g., recommended online training programs, funding for such programs) and support for the creation and delivery of online courses (e.g., organise working groups, hire experts to provide training on specific programs). This element also includes the development of mentoring programs or peer communities to facilitate the sharing of best practices in online teaching.

Successful online education in higher education also relies on robust *Student Support* systems that encompass various aspects of the online learning experience. The first element is technology access support, which assists students in navigating any technological challenges they might encounter and ensures they have access to the necessary technologies. The second element is communication support, which facilitates and enhances effective communication between university personnel and students, as well as among students. Creating a learning environment where students can experience a sense of belonging, trust, and mutual respect contributes to their learning effectiveness, satisfaction, and overall outcomes in online learning (Peacock & Cowan, 2019). Lastly, providing guidelines for a *Code of Conduct* and *Academic Integrity* is a critical form of student support for creating a safe and inclusive learning environment.

The *Guidelines for Course Design* include four major areas. The first is *Assessment*, which includes the assessment strategies and methods for online learning. The second area to consider is *Accessibility and Inclusivity*, which encompasses policies mandating the use of accessible online materials and platforms for students with disabilities, as well as inclusive teaching practices to support diverse learner needs. The third area is *Quality Assurance*, which ensures the effectiveness of online courses and programs through formal course evaluations and the monitoring of student satisfaction and engagement with online learning experiences. Finally, *Data Privacy, Security, and Copyright* are addressed through policies and procedures designed to protect student data, ensure privacy, and comply with relevant data protection regulations and standards.

Faculty Support, *Student Support* and *Guidelines for Course Design* are continually under review and improvements should be made as needed. This supports a culture of innovation where faculty and staff are supported to explore new technologies and pedagogical approaches for online learning. It also supports research and scholarship related to online education.

Each of these components are critical in supporting online learning for faculty and students. The remainder of the paper will describe each individual component within the framework (i.e., Institutional Policies, Governance and Leadership, Technology Infrastructure, Faculty Support, Student Support, Guidelines for Course Design, Continuous Improvement) with supporting research and detailed considerations while integrating continuous improvement and reflection.

Institutional Policies, Governance, and Leadership

The success of online learning requires institutions to develop systems to support faculty, students, and the organizational processes required to create and sustain online coursework (Pedro & Kumar, 2020). This includes institutional standards for online instruction that either reflect the specific institution's vision, and are developed from within, or guidelines developed from existing professional organizations (Pedro & Kumar, 2020). Online learning requires organizational processes to create and sustain online coursework and institutional changes to support faculty and students (Pedro & Kumar, 2020). One way to accomplish an effective institutional standard is by establishing a designated committee responsible for creating and overseeing policies for online teaching and learning. This committee defines roles and responsibilities for faculty, administrators, and support staff involved in online education. Establishing a strong leadership and decision-making team is essential at the institutional level to support faculty development through effective policies, enhance faculty performance and satisfaction, and improve overall institutional effectiveness (Hartman et al., 2000), all of which influence student learning outcomes. A well-defined institutional vision and strategy are crucial for ensuring clear program development (Casanovas, 2011). Additionally, these institutional policies and strategies influence all other components of the framework essential for successful online teaching and learning (Garcia-Penalvo, 2021).

Technology Infrastructure

Technology infrastructure relates to an institution having sufficient technical infrastructure to support online teaching and learning. This includes website, platforms, tools, and interoperability (Garcia-Penalvo, 2021). When Pedro and Kumar (2020) analysed institutional services identified in 13 frameworks focused on quality assurance to support online learning in higher education, they found that all frameworks identified technology and technological support as integral to online learning. Specific technologies included learning management systems, library systems, cloud-based tools and services, mobile technologies, hardware, and internal and external networks. In addition, student and faculty technical support and training were also fundamental pieces for online learning success along with frequent updates to support and meet student and faculty needs (Pedro & Kumar, 2020). These types of institutional support are necessary because Wingo et al. (2017) reported technology, in the form of student access and faculty technical issues, as a potential faculty concern related to teaching in an online environment. Faculty may experience frustration due to insufficient technology support and challenges in accessing necessary software and hardware, leading to a perceived lack of institutional support (Ertmer, 1999).

Faculty Support

Faculty are one stakeholder to consider when establishing and maintaining rigorous online teaching and learning programs. To effectively support faculty, ongoing training and professional development focused on online teaching, technology, and institutional policies related to teaching and course development should be offered, and available resources and mentoring programs developed (Pedro & Kumar, 2020). These aspects are important to consider because effective teaching practices and course design contribute to overall faculty satisfaction (Fredricksen et al., 2000).

Ongoing Training and Professional Development

The first area of support is to provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for faculty members to develop and improve their online teaching skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2016). Faculty should demonstrate a foundational understanding of online teaching and learning (Cutri & Mena, 2020). This could be through an institutional technology assessment, previous experience with a positive evaluation of online teaching, or a technology course(s) designed by the institution or nationally (e.g., Quality Matters). Upon completion of the foundational information, initial feedback should be collected from faculty members to identify their areas of need. A team of individuals (found under the *Governance and Leadership* section in the framework) can then determine topics of ongoing professional development sessions to support faculty in developing and improving their online teaching skills. Some examples of professional development can include designing online courses, evaluating their course design, using technology to promote learner engagement, creating a design that welcomes the learners, connecting the learning objectives with their assessments, or designing effective rubrics, just to name a few.

Resources

Faculty also need to be provided with the resources and support for the creation and delivery of online courses. The IHE should have a database of the supports that are accessible and can be used by the faculty. This can include information about specific licenses for software programs, technology tools (e.g., cameras, Pivo), collaborative platforms (including social networking tools), virtual reality (e.g., simulations), and any other innovative tools and approaches. With this information, it is critical to have an instructional technologist (IT) or identified individuals who can provide specific knowledge and support for each of these unique resources. While faculty can learn and be supported by professional development and a variety of resources, they do not need to be the experts of instructional technology.

Mentoring

Finally, faculty need to have established mentoring programs or peer communities for sharing best practices in online teaching (Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Johnson, 2015; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Faber, 2016; Lunsford et al., 2017). With this, the faculty member can receive guidance and support from a knowledgeable member of the campus community. Ideally, it is the most effective to have a mentor of the same gender (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Faber, 2016) as well as race (Harris & Lee, 2019). Through their collaboration, the faculty members can deepen their understanding in a smaller space which can increase their confidence (Lunsford et al., 2017). Having an internal point of contact within the institution provides valuable institutional knowledge, guidance on campus operations, and direction on whom to reach out to for questions or assistance. This partnership builds community on campus and extends the typical network of campus colleagues. It also facilitates the growth and development of high-potential leaders and fosters an inclusive and diverse collaborative environment.

Student Support

Students are the center of education, and the primary objective of education is their learning. Supporting students in online learning is necessary to ensure the overall quality of a students' academic success (Wang et al., 2012). Online learning has several advantages for students, such as being free from geographical restrictions to access education, being able to learn at their own pace, and cost-effectiveness (Panigrahi et al., 2018). However, the same advantages could also be challenges for students. Online learning requires students to possess technology self-efficacy, self-motivation, and commitment to learning in a different way than in-person education (Shelton et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2012). To enhance student support in an online learning environment, it is essential to address technology access, communication, the code of conduct, and academic integrity.

Technology Access

Online learning requires students to have access to the minimum technology skills and equipment required by the course design (Menchaca & Bekele, 2008; Shelton et al., 2014). It is imperative to clearly state all types of hardware and software equipment required for program completion prior to the start of the program. This information can come from the admissions office, via the institutional website, and other appropriate places that can be easily accessed. Additionally, posting online self-assessment activities can help students evaluate whether they have the necessary technical equipment, skills, motivation, and commitment to succeed in an online course (Wagiran et al., 2022).

Once students register for an online course and/or program, higher education institutions must ensure that students have access to technical support, training, and mentoring to navigate online learning throughout the course/program (Shelton et al., 2014). Students' satisfaction as service users positively correlates with an increase in their motivation to learn (Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2020). The online portal should clearly display contact information, making it easy for students to find assistance or ask questions (e.g., if a student forgets their password or if the online platforms are not working properly). When individuals believe the organizational and technical infrastructure exists to support their technology use, their actual use of the technology increases (Im et al., 2011; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Higher education institutions should also consider adopting user-friendly online learning platforms as they promote students' technology self-efficacy and better self-regulated online learning behaviors (Wagiran et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2012).

Promoting students' positive attitude toward technology and online learning is one of the critical factors for successful online education (Chang & Smith, 2008; Marks et al., 2005; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008; Puzziferro, 2008; Wagiran et al., 2022). Technology skills and the capabilities of the equipment directly have a significant effect on user satisfaction and motivation in online learning (Wagiran et al., 2022). As student technology self-efficacy grows, so does their motivation to participate in online learning (Beardsley et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2013). The primary factors influencing individuals' adoption of technology are perceived usefulness and ease of use (Ros et al., 2015). Adopting easy-to-use learning platforms and structures, as well as providing enjoyable experiences using new technologies through peer interactions, may smooth students' transition to a new online course (Panigrahi et al., 2018; Venkatesh & Sykes, 2013).

Communication

Clear communication channels between higher education staff and faculty, as well as among students, must be provided to enable students to seek assistance and maximize their online learning. Retaining students in online education is more challenging than in traditional in-person programs (Bawa, 2016; Perna et al., 2014). Attrition factors in online education include students' lack of time, feeling of isolation, insufficient background knowledge and skills, and difficulty with keeping motivation up (Belanger & Thornton, 2013; Yuan & Powell, 2013). Online learning can sometimes be isolating for students as they may miss out on face-to-face interactions with peers and instructors. Without adequate support and communication, students may become disengaged, experience higher levels of frustration, or feel overwhelmed by the demands of online coursework (Menchaca & Bekele, 2008).

Higher education institutions must ensure that students have access to effective academic, personal, and career counseling online (Shelton et al., 2014). Providing support services such as online tutoring, academic advising, and mentoring, which can consist of guidance on study strategies, access to learning resources, and assistance with course materials, also enhances students' academic success (Menchaca & Bekele, 2008; Wagiran et al., 2022). Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) should be provided online to address students' most common questions regarding online education, which saves time for both students and faculty (Shelton et al., 2014). These support systems enhance students' technology self-efficacy and self-regulated learning behaviors, ultimately increasing course satisfaction and improving learning outcomes (Wang et al., 2012). When students' course satisfaction increases, the attrition rate in online learning decreases (Arbaugh, 2000; Billings, 2000; Levy, 2007; Thurmond et al., 2002).

In a virtual community, individuals feel a sense of belonging when they can experience the following three factors of social capital: familiarity with members in the structural dimension, perceived similarity with others from the cognitive dimension, and the trust in other members from the relational dimension (Zhao et al., 2012). Creating a learning environment where students can feel familiarity and share similarities with their peers, as well as trust and respect each other, enhances a sense of belonging among students. For instance, a peer-buddy system to encourage community building among students can enhance student's sense of belonging in an online learning community and increase retention rates (Nazir et al., 2015). When students feel a sense of belonging in an online community, their levels of engagement and participation increase (Zhao et al., 2012), which is a key to students' learning effectiveness, satisfaction, and outcomes in online learning (Hu & Hui, 2012).

Using teaching strategies that encourage, facilitate, and reward students' active engagement such as providing quick feedback to first-time posts or offering briefings to recap the lesson content, also promotes greater student learning engagement (Hu & Hui, 2012; Nazir et al., 2015). Allowing students to learn from multiple means (e.g., articles, videos, podcasts) and using mixed synchronous and asynchronous tools enhances students' satisfaction and learning outcomes (Menchaca & Bekele, 2008).

Code of Conduct

Guidelines for a *Code of Conduct* in online learning are crucial for creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. These guidelines help institutions appropriately respond to disruptive behavior, provide clear channels of communication in case of behavior or discipline problems, and establish shared expectations between all stakeholders (Summerville, 2005). Faculty involvement in developing and updating the guidelines is critical to enhance the adoption of a proactive approach with the goal of fostering respectful interactions among all stakeholders and ensuring compliance with the code of conduct (Coleman, 2012; Rezaee et al., 2001). It is also important for the *Code of Conduct* to be made easily accessible online.

The guidelines should include respect and protection of digital dignity, commitment to the profession, commitment to the online learning system, instructors' and students' rights and responsibilities within an online learning environment (Rose, 2017; Salhab et al., 2021). Respect and protection of digital dignity should be considered a human right that should be respected and treated without any discrimination (Salhab et al., 2021; Saputra et al., 2020). All human rights respected in a face-to-face physical space should also be respected in the digital space, so all learners can feel safe and comfortable to contribute (Salhab et al., 2021). The *Code of Conduct* may prohibit all stakeholders from discriminating against individuals based on their race, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or political orientation in the online learning environment.

The guidelines must also address how to handle non-threatening (e.g., requesting contact in the middle of the night, inappropriate background during an online session, inappropriate dress/clothing during online session or video recording, persistent speaking during online session, interrupting others during an online session) and threatening (e.g., arguing on a discussion board, using aggressive or offensive language or verbal threats to peers to faculty) disruptive behavior in online learning settings. They establish clear expectations for appropriate conduct, communication, and collaboration among students and between students and instructors (Summerville, 2005). By defining acceptable behavior and outlining consequences for violations, institutions can ensure a safe and structured learning environment for all students (Summerville, 2005). The *Code of Conduct* guidelines should clearly outline a list, including the order, of individuals within the institution who should be contacted in case of behavior or discipline problems. This includes designated faculty members, administrators, or support staff who can handle student concerns and address issues promptly.

To emphasize the importance of adhering to the *Code of Conduct*, it is essential for students to sign an agreement stating their understanding of the expectations of online learning prior to beginning the course. This agreement ensures that students are aware of the guidelines, consequences of misconduct, and their responsibility to contribute to a positive learning environment (Coleman, 2012).

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity policies and guidelines are another important aspect to ensure an ethical online educational environment that supports students' learning. Academic integrity is the commitment to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage (Benson et al.,

2019). It entails upholding ethical standards in academic pursuits. Conversely, academic misconduct refers to acts aimed at gaining or attempting to gain an unfair academic advantage (Benson et al., 2019).

Protecting academic integrity has been one of the greatest challenges for higher education, especially for online programs (Lanier, 2006; Rezaee et al., 2001), because academic misconduct occurs more frequently in online courses than in-person courses (Lanier, 2006; Miller & Young-Jones, 2012). In fact, students reported that they felt it was easier to cheat in online courses than in-person courses (Miller & Young-Jones, 2012). Cheating, such as turning in work done by someone else, completing work for someone else, giving or receiving inappropriate help, using a false excuse, or submitting previous work in subsequent courses, is accepted in many academic subcultures among students (Miller & Young-Jones, 2012).

Academic integrity policies and guidelines promote a culture of honesty and uphold the integrity of online learning. Academic integrity guidelines should include a preventative approach, such as online tutorials that clarify what constitutes academic misconduct in the online environment (Benson et al., 2019). They should also outline disciplinary actions, specifying the consequences of violating academic integrity policies. Moreover, the guidelines should incorporate a restorative justice approach that seeks a solution aimed at rebuilding trust and repairing any damage among all parties involved (Benson et al., 2019). By addressing academic integrity explicitly, students gain a clear understanding of the expectations and can make informed decisions.

To ensure that the person registered for the course is the one actively participating, guidelines should include measures to verify student identity (Fidas et al., 2023). These measures can involve secure authentication methods, such as unique login credentials, biometric identification, or multi-factor authentication (Fidas et al., 2023). Learning Management Systems (LMSs) usually employ a single-entry point for student identification (password to sign in). In Video Conferencing Tools (VCTs), student identification and verification procedures are primarily conducted manually through human intervention (e.g., faculty checking participation). However, those systems are not necessarily perfect, especially for maintaining the integrity of online assessments, but IHEs should have foundational methods in place because it is important that the IHE establish appropriate procedures that protect the credibility and trustworthiness of students' evaluation processes.

University-wide guidelines for academic integrity must also include specific instructions on how to avoid plagiarism. This includes defining plagiarism, providing examples, and explaining how to properly cite sources in online coursework. Clear guidelines promote academic honesty, support proper research practices, and cultivate a culture of integrity among students. Higher education institutions may consider creating a rubric or framework to assess the severity of violations and establish clear procedures for addressing misconduct. This helps maintain consistency and fairness in handling academic integrity cases. The rubric can specify different levels of severity, along with corresponding consequences or corrective actions, fostering transparency and a fair approach to addressing behavior.

Guidelines for Course Design

Guidelines for course design should be supported through assessment strategies and methods for online learning including addressing quality assurance, accessibility through policies that require the use of online materials and platforms to support students with disabilities, inclusive teaching practices to accommodate diverse learner needs, and establishment of procedures to protect student data, ensure privacy, and address copyright needs.

Quality assurance can be assessed by comparing courses to IHE-created standards or the use of a set of professionally developed criteria, such as the rubric provided by Quality Matters. Making these comparisons provides a benchmark of expectations for courses to meet to ensure quality control across faculty members, departments, and content. Pedro and Kumar (2020) found that data collection was an essential institutional service needed for IHE online learning. Data collected related to online learning is not only needed to ensure program quality, but also to elevate effectiveness and to aid faculty with determining ways in which to conduct ongoing course improvement (e.g. course design, platforms, and tools). Quality assurance requires a multifaceted approach, including a comprehensive course review based on research-supported standards and the collection of student data to inform course improvements. To accomplish this, Institutional support is needed to collect the data necessary to inform these important decisions.

When thinking about policies related to course design for a variety of students, best practices for online learning include supporting the needs of diverse learners, designing inclusive instruction with culturally inclusive materials, and creating courses that are accessible to all students (Lewis, 2021). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, IHE-created standards and professionally developed rubrics can be used to guide course design policies to ensure support for a variety of learners. While online learning promotes equity, diversity, and inclusion by enhancing access and flexibility, effective pedagogy and course design are crucial for supporting student success (Ikebuchi, 2023). Courses need to be designed to meet the needs of diverse learners with diverse needs (e.g. tags for images, color/font/shape contrast, closed captioning). To set campus-wide continuity of access, official accessibility and accommodation policies created by the IHE are necessary. Along with an official policy, the IHE should mandate a learner orientation before students enroll in online courses to help them navigate content, while also providing faculty training in access, cultural inclusivity, and accessibility.

Many research papers focus on the need for data protection, privacy, and copyright information for students, but IHEs need to also make these considerations for faculty. IHEs need to provide specific guidelines related to their learning management systems, including making works available to enrolled students, using the same work repeatedly, and preventing dissemination of work. A learner privacy statement that is specific to online learning should also be created so students and faculty understand expectations. In addition, the IHE should include resources that assist instructors in understanding copyright issues. Guidelines related to the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization Act (TEACH), which provides guidelines for appropriate use of copyrighted materials and how this impacts online learning, should assist instructors in navigating designated policies (Crews, 2002). This information should also be shared with students within the course syllabus in addition to being available online and within the student handbook. Transparency in course design

and clearly defined institution-provided policies help establish a shared understanding of expectations and support for students, faculty, and administration.

Continuous Improvement

With technology ever evolving, continuous improvement in online courses is paramount to success. Institutions need to support a culture of innovation and encourage faculty and staff to explore new technologies and pedagogical approaches for online learning. In addition, research and scholarship related to online education need to be reinforced through institutional funding and integration of research findings.

Continued improvement in quality coursework requires periodic review of courses to ensure alignment with specific institutional and national standards (Lewis, 2021). These improvements also hinge on the IHE having clear institutional policies and course design requirements. Current policies and procedures within IHEs can potentially hinder quality improvement and these barriers need to be examined and removed (Lewis, 2021). The framework for reviewing and analyzing IHE policies and support for online teaching and learning can help institutions identify the steps required to enhance online programs, faculty, and student support. However, successful institutional adoption of such a framework requires a well-defined support structure and a strategic vision (Castro & Tumibay, 2021). In addition, for program improvement to continue to take place, institutional leadership needs to ensure that goals for quality online learning are aligned with the strategic plan. This alignment helps faculty and staff feel supported and conveys the message that all educational programs are important across campus, regardless of the delivery model (Britto et al., 2013).

Conclusion

This paper introduces an overall framework for higher education institutional policy that could substantially strengthen university governance supporting online teaching and learning for faculty and students. Key components of the framework include a) creation of institutional policies that align with university vision; b) development of infrastructure supporting technology; c) design of ongoing professional development, mentoring and resources for faculty; d) planned support for students that addresses user-friendliness, channels for communication, academic integrity and codes of conduct in e-learning communities; e) guidelines targeting quality, accessibility, inclusivity of teaching practices, privacy and protection of student data; and f) mechanisms for continuous improvement reflecting current research and university needs. Each component of this framework is interconnected, making it integral that university support is established across all levels (e.g., administrative, faculty, students) to promote positive online program outcomes. Institutional leadership must clearly articulate its vision for implementing policies that support online learning, maintain consistency across departments, and provide the necessary resources to sustain and uphold high-quality online instruction.

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in Higher Education***

Senior Guest Editor: Gregor Thuswaldner, Ph.D.

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