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Presidential Arcs: What Institutional Histories Can Tell Us About The Office

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PRESIDENTIAL ARCS:
WHAT INSTITUTIONAL HISTORIES CAN TELL US ABOUT THE OFFICE

JENNIFER A. CARLO

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program

of Antioch University

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

June, 2014

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

PRESIDENTIAL ARCS:
WHAT INSTITUTIONAL HISTORIES CAN TELL US ABOUT THE OFFICE

prepared by

Jennifer A. Carlo

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership and Change.

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Abstract

This comparative case study defined and examined the presidential arc at three small, private colleges in the Northeast. The study of an institution's presidential arc is proposed as a more effective means of assessing the success or failure of higher education presidencies than examination of a single presidency in isolation. The presidential arc, a concept introduced in this study, is defined as a comprehensive and integrative examination of: each individual presidency, or, at institutions with a history of short–term presidents who left little impact on, groups of presidencies; the level of success of each presidency, as determined by a definition shared with all correspondents or interviewees; the institutional culture, history, and self–defined "saga"; and environmental factors that significantly impact presidencies or institutional history (i.e., enrollment trends, the national or regional economy, trends in curriculum, shifts in the national higher education culture, etc.). Comparative examination of touchpoints (common or parallel themes or events) in each of three arcs yielded four broad themes with wider implications for success and failure in the higher education presidency: founding president syndrome/evolving role of the academic presidency; institutional saga/insularity of small schools with distinctive cultures; competing cultures in modern higher education; and legitimacy of the presidency and individual presidents. The study concludes with a set of recommendations for institutions to take collective responsibility for the success or failure of their presidencies: redefine our expectations of the presidency; jointly plan for success; understand and use the concept of the presidential arc in searching for new presidents; and change the way we search for presidents. This ETD is available in open access in Ohiolink ETD, http://etd.ohiolink.edu/, Center and AURA http://aura.antioch.edu/

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Chapter I: Introduction

Success and Failure in the Higher Education Presidency

A great deal rides on the success or failure of a higher education presidency. College and university presidents lead multifaceted, complex organizations with a complicated system of shared governance that makes leading them a challenge very different from that met by other leaders. Public interest in colleges and their presidents is acute; these are institutions that receive a great deal of public funding and perform vital teaching, research, and service functions for their communities and for society as a whole. Presidents are public figures within their communities. They are expected to wear many hats and to do so adeptly, as leaders, scholars, visionary planners, competent administrators, financial geniuses, and brilliant fundraisers. To falter in any of these roles is to risk the progress and health, and in some cases even the very existence, of their institutions and all those who depend of them for their livelihoods and learning. Presidents are expected to be faithful to an institution's history, culture, and traditions, while at the same time developing a vision to lead their complex enterprise forward into an unknown future of ever–increasing complexity; "the president oversees a ship in which there is little space for navigational error" (Association of Governing Boards, 2006, p. 3). As the American Council on Education noted in its 2007 report on the college presidency,

> The challenges and complexities of leading a higher education institution have changed radically and multiplied dramatically from what they were only 20 years ago . . . presidents' constituencies have widened, and their constituents' behavior and attitudes have shifted so as to place more demands on both their institutions and themselves. (American Council on Education [ACE], 2007, p. 1)

As in any other complex task, some higher education presidencies succeed while others fail. Defining success and failure in this context can be far more difficult than in the business world, where financial results are relatively easier to measure and are used as the main determinant for assessing a CEO's performance. One can gauge a higher education president's success or failure in many ways: growth in endowment and other financial resources; completion of capital campaigns or other ambitious fundraising targets; construction of new buildings; growth in enrollment; rise in academic standards or rankings; or creation of new and robust academic standards. The problem is: what measure to use? Each stakeholder or campus constituency may well place a different level of importance on each, and they are unlikely to agree even within their own groups (Bornstein, 2003, pp. 18–19). In recent decades presidents and their institutions have become far more accountable to external constituencies; it is no longer enough to keep the faculty and alumni happy to retain a presidency. Legislation and other government regulations require an increasing level of accountability in areas such as tuition costs, safety policies, and job placement, driven by public calls like the 2006 Spellings Commission recommendation for the "creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education" (The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006, p. 20).

Scholars and commentators of higher education have noted the increasing demands on presidents and their relationship to presidential success and failure. Hahn (1995) examined the array of skills and qualifications cited by advertisements in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* for new presidents and questioned whether we are setting the stage for failure by setting the bar

impossibly high. He notes that "the tales of imploding presidencies suggest that many have failed to demonstrate any success at all, let alone success gauged by godlike criteria" (Hahn, 1995, p. 11). More recent examinations of *The Chronicle* yield multiple stories about "embattled presidents" leaving their office (DeSantis, 2013b; Dunn, 2013).

We continue to conceptualize the higher education presidency and its responsibilities in much the same ways that we always have, despite the fact that the societal environment continues to change drastically and demands on presidents increase in an attempt to meet them (McLaughlin, 1996b). McLaughlin (2004, pp. 6–12) discusses the divergent expectations of a president in leadership (embodiment of institutional mission and communication of values and vision to various constituencies), management (direct oversight of the various day–to–day functions of the enterprise), and governance (marshaling the collaborative efforts of other university leaders and navigating the internal structures of shared power and decision–making). With all of these competing demands, and all these constituencies to serve, it is little wonder that some presidencies fail.

There is no single, objective definition of success or failure in the higher education presidency. A failed presidency costs an institution dearly in turmoil, opportunity cost, and personal and professional pain for those involved. Even a presidency that does not fail but does not particularly advance the institution carries a high cost. Time and attention that could be spent on teaching and scholarship, raising funds, or building new programs are focused elsewhere. Enrollment, academic reputation, and the ability to compete in an ever more difficult climate are all constrained when a presidency fails to thrive.

Gaps in the Existing Literature

Reviewing the recent literature confirms that there is little written specifically on presidential failure, and not much more on presidential success. One reason for this is that both success and failure are difficult to define, and failure is particularly difficult for people to discuss and address candidly to researchers. This is not a new phenomenon; one of the earliest studies notes that:

> A variety of barriers have frustrated many previous attempts to accumulate and analyze meaningful data on academic presidencies. The unique nature of the academic environment; the ambiguity characteristic of the collegiate presidency's functions; the extreme diversity among institutions; the absence of a coherent history of empirical research; and the lack of theoretical constructs for designing such studies represent those barriers. The literature offers much in the way of conjecture about the nature of the presidency but few conclusions grounded in data. (Cote, 1985, p. 664)

While much is written about higher education presidencies, the bulk of the literature focuses on "presidential career patterns, biographical sketches, and professional pathways" (Perrakis, Galloway, Hayes, & Robinson-Galdo, 2011, p. 57). This foundation may well have been helpful in past decades when this line of inquiry was in its infancy; the endless rehashing is less so today. We have amply documented that most college and university presidents are white, male, married, have a terminal degree, and rose up through the ranks of academic administration. We have noted that all of those factors show some slight changes—more women and minority presidents, more presidents from outside academic affairs, etc.—but not enough change, and at too slow a pace. Studies that examine the underlying causes of presidential success and failure would be of greater use to future presidents and the institutions they serve.

It is difficult to identify factors in presidential success and failure if they are taken out of their organizational context. Each presidency is a social construct formed by the president, the stakeholders of her institution, and the campus culture and history. A combination of personalities and circumstances that dooms one presidency to failure may well help another succeed, either at a different college or at different points in the life of a single institution. Little or no literature has been published on this "arc," or history, of the presidency at an individual institution, and this study will begin to examine this phenomenon.

The literature review for this study will draw from the existing literature on success and failure in the various roles and functions of the academic presidency; the history of the presidency and how it has evolved to its current form and function; the current challenges facing small private colleges and universities that can impact presidential success and failure; and organizational saga in higher education institutions.

Purpose of the Study

A large amount of time, money, and effort is spent in presidential searches each year. So why are some of the resulting presidencies less than successful? If we begin to subject this question to rigorous study, we can:

- Identify the causes and dynamics in less–successful presidencies;
- Help governing boards, faculties, campus administrators, and presidents themselves structure transitions and presidencies in ways that promote and enhance success;
- Better distinguish between "normal" transition and turnover in a new presidency and truly dysfunctional emerging dynamics;

- Inform the work of search consultants and committees to help find presidents who are the best fit for their institutions.

In 2011 I did an interview study in which several knowledgeable higher education practitioners were asked a series of questions about failed presidencies they had observed and the factors that led to those failures. Through that project, I developed the following definition:

> A failed college or university presidency is one that ends before the president or the institution anticipated, under circumstances perceived by the president or other key stakeholders to be less than optimal.

One of the strongest conclusions from that study is that under normal circumstances an individual president does not succeed or fail. Every higher education presidency, whether successful or not, is a complex mix of personal, institutional, and societal factors and events, and the individual and the institution share the responsibility for success or failure. (There are some exceptions, of course, with presidents who have significant personality or ethical challenges.)

However, this working definition has limitations because it is predicated on the way in which a presidency ends. In a separate interview study I did to identify cases for this dissertation, individuals with extensive higher education association and accreditation experience noted that presidencies have a natural ebb and flow that is often only apparent in hindsight; as one respondent stated: they "have a certain shelf life and it's a very unique president who knows when the expiration date is coming up on their tenure." Unlike business CEOS, who are judged by their companies' balance sheets and other objective measures, it is very difficult to gain consensus within a campus community on any clear measure of presidential success and failure. The same higher education executive quoted above stated that

when an individual takes office, the institution experiences the "optimism of a new president being appointed, new initiatives being started, hope that the institution will be taken to the next level . . . then an implementation stage—the arc levels off—change is seen and accomplishments are achieved . . . then there's a natural flow when the president has been there for some substantial period of time and people are ready for a change and the president leaves through one door or another." Barring a significant crisis, few individuals are self–aware enough to leave at the top of their arc. My respondent could think of only three presidents, in his twenty years of working with higher education institutions and their presidents, who left under entirely positive circumstances. Most end their tenures on a slight decline, which is not necessarily the same as a failure.

Another illustration of the limitations of this definition was found in the pilot for this dissertation study (expanded in Chapter IV), which was the examination of the "presidential arc" at a small private college in Northern New York. The founding president, served the institution from 1946 until approximately 1974. Over that time he built a thriving institution almost singlehanded, erecting buildings, hiring faculty, and personally recruiting students. However, his methods would not be considered appropriate today. He allowed no faculty or institutional governance structures and had few administrative colleagues, preferring to make all decisions himself. A faculty member interviewed for the pilot described the institution as a "personal fiefdom" under President A's rule.

This president did keep that college running, and without his leadership there would be no college today. However, in time the board recognized that his one–man approach was no

longer appropriate, and they asked him to leave when he would have liked to continue. His presidency might therefore be considered a failure under this working definition, but by most standards it was not. It simply ended on a sour note that goes some way to obscure the successes that came before. Both of these examples underscore the need for a wider perspective in examining presidential success and failure.

A better way to examine the factors involved in presidential success and failure is to look at the “arc,” or history, of the presidency at a single institution, and to compare these arcs to those at other institutions to see what patterns emerge. Each college or university has its own culture, history, and mores, and a wider historical perspective enables us to see individual successes and failures not as isolated incidents but as part of the rich tapestry of an institutional history. Do faculty interactions at an institution tend to offer the same kinds of opportunities and challenges to each successive president as s/he enters office? If so, what can we learn about the ways in which different presidential interactions with faculty influenced institutional outcomes? If an institution has had successive presidencies that were deemed “successful” or “failed,” what factors at the institution or in its environment contributed to those results?

Financial factors immediately come to mind when pondering this question. Fundraising skill can compensate for other areas a president does not handle as well. In a recession, when fundraising becomes more difficult for reasons outside a president’s control, other campus challenges may impact a presidency differently.

Rather than looking at isolated presidencies, more valuable insights can be gleaned from an examination of how an institution’s fortunes and experiences intersect with multiple

presidencies. Again, presidencies are not merely personal constructs; they are complex intersections between presidents, their institutions, and their environments. Examining a "presidential arc" instead of an individual presidency also makes the exercise appropriately less personal. Participants in such a study are more able to be honest and candid with their professional assessments of dynamics and events and less called to pass judgment on individuals with whom they may have worked closely. More complete and honest information should yield more usable results.

An institution's presidential arc is a comprehensive examination of:

- Each individual presidency, or, at institutions with a history of short–term or interim presidents who left little impact on an institution, groups of presidencies;
- The level of success of each presidency, as determined by a definition shared with all correspondents or interviewees;
- The institutional culture, history, and self–defined "saga" (Clark, 1972);
- Environmental factors that significantly impact individual presidencies or the institutional history (i.e., enrollment trends, the national or regional economy and its effects on fundraising and the institution's finances, trends in curriculum, shifts in the national higher education culture, etc.)

An institution's presidential arc tells a story, a complex story in which differing viewpoints must be interwoven with institutional and societal events. It is a story of the lived experience of its participants, past and present, and of the interpretations they assign to each presidency and ongoing events, examined through a scholarly lens. It is also the story of an

institution's lived experience and how the personalities, talents, foibles, and initiatives of its leaders affect its viability and destiny.

Careful examination of a presidential arc will yield various institutional "touchpoints," which are persistent themes or significant events that influenced the presidential arc and/or the successes or failures of individual presidencies. Studying individual presidencies cannot yield much that is definitive in determining causes of presidential success and failure; the higher education presidency is too complex a social construct to draw simplistic conclusions from a short span of time in an institution's rich history. By examining the complex intersections between individual actions, institutional culture, and societal trends over a longer arc, however, we can draw broader conclusions that will inform the way we select, support, and evaluate our presidents. Touchpoints are identified after speaking at length with multiple individuals with experience in different roles at an institution and by examining more objective data, like financial and enrollment trends.

Examination of an institution's presidential arc will yield insights into presidential successes and failure at that particular institution. However, in order to draw broader conclusions it will be necessary to examine multiple arcs and study them for common touchpoints that mirror each other and illuminate what little literature exists on presidential success and failure. To be most effective, presidential arcs should be compared to those of other institutions of similar size, complexity, and location to ensure that identified touchpoints are not isolated and unique to a given school.

Design of the Study

The research question for this study is: What factors in presidential success or failure can be identified by comparing the arcs and touchpoints of the presidency at small private colleges and universities?

A comparative case study allows the best exploration of this question. Colleges and universities are loosely bounded systems that exist as unique cases composed of many experiences and events (Miller & Salkind, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). A case study can "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real–life events" (Yin, 2009, p. 4); in this research, in the arc of the presidencies studied. Case studies are particularly appropriate for studies of complex organizations, with multiple stakeholders and phenomena that occur over time and an institution's history (Fitzgerald & Dopson, 2009, p. 468).

It will be necessary to examine more than one case to begin to determine whether issues in success and failure in the presidency are similar in different institutions, or whether the circumstances are unique to a single school. This will not be a collective case study, in which element of several different cases are gathered together into one narrative to address a single question (Miller & Salkind, 2002; Stake, 1995), but a comparative case study with cross–case analysis, in which each presidential arc will be examined as its own case and similarities and differences with other institutions then explored (Yin, 2009). The purpose of the study will be to examine the presidential arcs carefully for touchpoints of crisis or change and then to compare them between institutions for commonalities and differences that might offer insights into the broader ways in which higher education presidencies work.

My Own Position

There are a number of reasons I would like to study success and failure in the higher education presidency. My interest in the topic was piqued by the fact that I have survived four presidencies over my twenty–plus year career in student affairs that were judged “failed” by most observers. In the first three cases, the president concerned served for a very brief period of time (two years each in two of the cases, and four years in the third) before departing at the request of the board of trustees. These three presidencies took place at very different institutions: a private two–year college; a community college; and a nationally–known progressive institution offering bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Although all three institutions are located in rural areas in the same region of the country, to the best of my knowledge there were few, if any, ties between them. The fourth case was slightly different; the president had served for eight years with little distinction or progress on the goals set for her by the board. The governing board was forced to ask her to leave after a string of allegations of financial and legal misfeasance against top administrators in the middle of a floundering comprehensive campaign to which her lack of oversight was a significant factor. This institution (four–year, private) is in a different region of the country and has, again, nothing in common with the other three. There is no immediately identifiable reason or factor that could account for failed presidencies at four such disparate institutions. They have few academic programs and no board or faculty members in common. They did not serve the same student populations. To the best of my knowledge, I am the only individual to have worked full–time at more than one of these institutions in the period during which these four presidencies failed. Only one of the four had a real history of

governance conflict. Why, I therefore asked myself, have I experienced this phenomenon so often? I played no direct role in the failure of any of these presidencies. Were failed presidencies a common occurrence in higher education, and if so, why?

What these institutions did have in common was the turmoil, opportunity cost, and human and institutional toll of a college presidency that either fails outright or is less successful than the community hoped. McLaughlin (1996a) terms these presidencies “early exits.” Institutions that experience these “early exits”—or even what I might call the “lingering exits” of a presidency that does not necessarily fail but that does not particularly advance the institution—cannot move forward robustly. Individuals suffer both personally and professionally. I have observed and experienced firsthand the damage to institutions, careers, and lives that failed presidencies can cause. In each case, I either reported directly to the president, or to someone who did, so I had a very clear view of events as they evolved. I watched as issues such as lack of attention to administrative processes, failure to communicate clearly with the campus community, or poor relationships with the trustees contributed to a president’s effects on campus morale and turmoil. Small colleges and universities are complex but bounded systems in which a president’s every action has far–reaching consequences. When a presidency is in trouble, it is difficult to know whom to trust or who will prevail. In one case, a president had dismissed several other direct reports, and I wanted to keep my job. The campus community was fairly united in disapproval of the direction the president was moving in financial and academic matters, and I agreed with them. I struggled to express my concerns to the president, to whom I also reported, while still retaining trust and preserving my job. The

strain was enormous and unnecessary; much time and emotional energy was wasted as I tried to walk an increasingly fine line. I ended up finding another position, as did many other talented administrators, in an exodus of talent that delayed the implementation of the institution's strategic initiatives.

All four of my presidents shared one overriding characteristic: the conviction that their path was the correct one, and that those who challenged them or who offered other perspectives did so either to pursue agendas of their own or because they simply failed to understand the broader burdens under which the president struggled. Some of this was no doubt true. Colleges and universities are complex systems of many competing agendas and stakeholders, and no one can truly know how it must feel to carry the awesome responsibility of a presidency until they occupy that office. However, the failure to grasp the culture of the institution and to engage complementary talent in the pursuit of shared goals leads to presidential failure, and anyone aspiring to a presidency must understand the pitfalls and the reasons presidencies fail. Too much is riding on their success to remain ignorant. Someday I want to be a successful college president, and until then I want to work for successful presidents who lead thriving institutions. I hope this research will contribute to empirical recognition of the problem of failed presidencies, and perhaps even to some solutions.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I includes the research question, the purpose and background of the study, and the positionality of the researcher.

Chapter II is a review of the literature on success and failure in the higher education presidency, highlighting the gaps in the existing literature and the need for this study.

Chapter III describes the study's methodology and explains why a comparative case study model is most appropriate for this research question.

Chapter IV is an in–depth review of the data generated by the three case studies and their touchpoints and trends.

Chapter V analyzes the cases and the conclusions that can be drawn from them, including implications for further research and for professional practice.

Chapter II: A Review of the Literature

There is very little published specifically about success and failure in the academic presidency, although there is more literature on success, much of it intended as prescriptive advice for new presidents. Few have studied the matter empirically, which is one of the gaps in the body of knowledge this study is intended to begin to redress. However, a good deal has been written about the evolution of the role of the president, about the functions and characteristics of modern presidents, and about specific aspects of the presidential role that may impact on a presidency's success or failure.

It is also essential to place the study of the presidential arc firmly within the literature on the study of colleges and universities as organisms and social systems. An institution's presidential arc is a key element of its organizational saga and history, and this study will be informed by past research on higher education organizational identity and saga.

Literature on the Development and Evolving Role of the Academic Presidency

The role of the college president in the popular academic imagination stems from the larger–than–life presidents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who not only drove the fortunes of their institutions but introduced educational innovations that gave us the modern university structure that endures today—those termed the "captains of erudition" by Thorstein Veblen (1918). The earliest presidents often came to office through politicized appointments from sponsoring religious organizations or the leaders of colonies and then states. As higher education grew, small colleges might have a president who also set all academic and student policy with little interference. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that external

pressures in the form of the public, the state, and the alumni began to impinge on presidential prerogatives (Thelin, 2004). However, “virtually all commentators agree that presidents in recent years have not lived up to the standards set by the energetic leaders . . . who established the modern American university” (Dennison, 2001, p. 271). Higher education presidents today do not enjoy the freedom and autonomy of those in the past, nor the automatic deference that vanished with the social upheavals of the late twentieth century. Current presidencies carry so many competing pressures that officeholders in a recent American Council on Education study on the academic presidency “described the essential questions of planning as having moved away from transformation . . . to reaction” (ACE, 2007, p. 4). As a result, the role may be less attractive to modern–day innovators—“the giants of today . . . spurn the job of college or university president precisely because it involves so little of consequence and provides such a small return on the investment of time and energy” (Dennison, 2001, p. 273). Even Neil Rudenstine, who served as president of Harvard for a decade after a long career at Princeton culminating in the position of provost, noted that “the job of the university president now has to do with continuing to set academic priorities . . . trying to keep the institution humane . . . and leaving the institution no worse off than you found it” (Greenberg, 1998, pp. 16–17). Rudenstine was forced to take a well–publicized leave of absence midway through his Harvard tenure to seek treatment for exhaustion.

Early presidents were firmly in control of their institutions, overseeing everything from the hiring of faculty and the establishment of curriculum to the rigid control of the personal lives

of students. Greenberg (1998) outlines a few of the achievements of the “great men” of the past:

> Not so long ago, college presidents were revered public figures. At the University of Chicago, the blustery Robert Maynard Hutchins introduced the country to “Great Books” and was eyed as a successor to Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. At Harvard, James Conant helped found the National Science Foundation, led the cold war debates on nuclear weapons, and advised presidents from Roosevelt to Eisenhower. (p. 17)

These presidents had few constraints placed upon them from outside the institution, and a great deal of deference from faculty and students enabled them to accomplish their goals; they “often wielded unchecked authority to create great institutions” (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005, p. 341). Their intelligence, determination, and drive—in short, their leadership traits—determined their fates and the fates of their institutions.

However, after colleges and universities began to evolve into more modern institutions in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars of the academic presidency began to note the difficulties inherent in the role. College and university presidents sit at the helm of what Cohen and March long ago termed “organized anarchies” (Cohen & March, 1986, p. 2), a concept that has been used subsequently in a great deal of higher education research. Three characteristics define an organized anarchy: problematic goals, unclear technology (meaning the processes used to achieve goals), and fluid participation (Cohen & March, 1986, p. 3). In their view:

> The American college or university is a prototypic organized anarchy. It does not know what it is doing. Its goals are either vague or in dispute. Its technology is familiar but not understood. Its major participants wander in and out of the organization. These factors do not make a university a bad organization or a disorganized one; but they do make it a problem to describe, understand, and lead. (Cohen & March, 1986, p. 3)

In short, many situational and contingency leadership theories that presuppose fairly direct systems of cause and effect influence between leaders and followers will not necessarily work well in higher education. There are too many different, competing, and unclear goals in colleges and universities to make these approaches effective. Processes of influence and control are often muddy or ineffective. And while all institutions have a definite hierarchy, power and influence are diffused among many departments and committees that change from situation to situation and indeed, sometimes from day to day.

Other salient factors in successful presidential leadership are the tradition of collective and participatory governance in higher education and the unique standing of the faculty. The American Association of University Professors' (AAUP's) Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities (1966, p. 136) cites the "inescapable interdependence among governing board, administration, faculty, students and others" in a call for open communication and collaboration among all campus constituencies. They note that "important areas of action involve at one time or another the initiating capacity and decision–making participation of all the institutional components" and state that "when an educational goal has been established, it becomes the responsibility primarily of the faculty to determine the appropriate curriculum and procedures of student instruction" (AAUP, 1966, p. 136). Although the principles of faculty autonomy and joint governance outlined in this statement represent an ideal "seen by some as an academic Camelot—devoutly to be wished for but not achievable by mere mortals" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 8), these principles carry great resonance in higher education and a successful president

disregards them with peril. The college or university president typically lacks the directive power of a corporate CEO; s/he

> is more like the head of a highly creative enterprise such as a 'think tank' or a symphony orchestra, where the knowledge resides with the researcher or the instrument players and where the senior management constantly walks the line between control and entrustment of duties and functions. (Padilla, 2005, p. 15)

Competing cultures in academia have also developed over the years to further complicate the job of higher education leadership. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) discuss six distinct and competing academic cultures, the most prevalent of which are managerial and collegiate. The managerial culture, one of the "twin pillars of twentieth–century higher education in the United States and Canada," (p. 43) is gaining ascendance with the increased emphasis on outcomes and assessment in higher education. The managerial culture grew from Catholic higher education and community colleges, with their clear definition of education as a means to attain specific skills and abilities as a path to social and economic advancement (pp. 43–71). Proponents of the managerial or "business" approach to higher education may seek ways to create "high performance" academic institutions by combining an alignment of organizational structure with institutional goals, strong leadership at the top, and decentralization to promote effective and informed decision–making (Tierney, 1999, pp. 21–32). However, positional authority is not always adequate for a president to lead her community in positive change; presidents must seek ways to exercise thoughtful and dynamic leadership in an atmosphere in which many other leaders are attempting to do the same (Gallant & Getz, 2009).

The managerial culture stands in direct contrast to the collegial culture, drawn from the older colonial colleges and private liberal arts institutions. The collegial culture embraces the more traditional conception of higher education “that conceives of the institution’s enterprise as the generation, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge and as the development of specific values and qualities of character among young men and women who are future leaders of our society” (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008, p. 15). Engagement and quality are more salient in this approach (Wergin, 2003, p. 33). The contrast between these two cultures in higher education makes role definition additionally difficult for college and university presidents.

As the role of the president changed, scholars wrote of many ways in which presidents could enhance their leadership and create meaningful change at their institutions, despite the many inherent challenges of the role. They did so in the context of the rapidly changing environment of higher education in the 21st century:

> Higher education organizations are faced with unprecedented challenges in the 21st century: increasing diversity of students and faculty and enhancing environments where that diversity can thrive, responding to federal calls for greater accountability, creating cultures where academic integrity is the norm and academic misconduct is minimized, harnessing the beneficial power of technology while not diminishing the power of interpersonal relationships, and maintaining a strong teaching and learning environment in the face of increasing pressures to do more research and admit more students. (Gallant & Getz, 2009, p. 93)

Although much of a president’s day–to–day leadership is of necessity transactional, opportunities may arise for truly transformational leadership during times of institutional crisis or when benchmarking against more successful institutions is necessary for survival. This is especially true at small institutions (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 205; Birnbaum, 1992a).

Success and Failure in the Higher Education Presidency

A review of the literature on success and failure in the presidency over the past thirty years demonstrates an evolving set of data on presidents deemed to be successful and/or effective. Fisher, Tack, and Wheeler (1988) conducted an extensive study of 485 presidents and other higher education experts and asked them to identify individuals they believed were effective college and university presidents. They note that, at that time, there were 2,800 presidents in the United States and 15% of them were deemed “effective” by their peers. The researchers then surveyed the “effective” presidents and a control group of presidents who were not deemed effective about their approaches to presidential leadership. They determined that the effective presidents were:

- Less collegial and more distant;
- More inclined to rely upon respect than affiliation;
- More inclined to take risks;
- More committed to an ideal or a vision than to an institution;
- More inclined to support merit pay;
- More thoughtful, shrewd, and calculating than spontaneous;
- More likely to work long hours;
- More supportive of organizational flexibility;
- More experienced; and
- More frequently published. (Fisher & Koch, 1996, p. 57)

In the twenty–five years that have followed this study, as will be shown, expectations for presidents have evolved. Much more emphasis is now placed on collaborative leadership, effective communication, cognitive complexity, and the ability to foster effective leadership at all levels of the organization.

There is very little empirical literature about reasons why presidencies fail, perhaps because failure is so difficult to objectively determine. In an interview study I performed in 2011

with eight higher education professionals with extensive experience as presidents, search consultants, and association officials, I identified the following reasons for failed presidencies:

- A BAD FIT between the president and the institution;
- A FLAWED SEARCH process;
- ISSUES WITH THE TRUSTEES, which fell into two broad categories; difficult or mismanaged relationships between the president and the board, or inappropriate behavior on the part of key trustees or the board as a whole;
- CIRCUMSTANCES BEYOND THE PRESIDENT'S CONTROL, which could include campus scandals not of the president's making but for which the president is nonetheless held accountable, or outside circumstances that make it impossible for the president to continue in office;
- BAD PERSONAL JUDGMENT on the president's part, which can include outright malfeasance as well as ill–advised expenditures, antagonism of key constituencies, or poor personnel decisions.

The last two reasons are fairly easy to identify when they occur; of greater interest is the literature on the first three.

McLaughlin (1996a) offers three reasons for what she calls "early exits" from a presidency: "rejection of alien tissue," "industrial accidents," and "the accumulation of straws." "Rejection of alien tissue," which in McLaughlin's observation generally happens quite early in a presidency, is a mismatch between a president's talents and either the institutional culture or the job itself. This is what my earlier correspondents termed a "bad fit." "Industrial accidents"

encompasses crises or scandals which, although not always directly under the president's control, are nonetheless attributed to the president and end his or her tenure. "Accumulation of straws" may be less dramatic, but still result in a presidency that ends earlier than the incumbent had planned because unresolved problems have accumulated to a point where the situation can no longer be salvaged (McLaughlin, 1996a, pp. 9–11). The problem is that too few institutions seek to reflectively determine why a presidency has failed; instead, too often "the president is identified as the culprit for the institution's failure to make significant strides . . . [and] college and universities . . . go in search of a newer model, rather than attempt to figure out what was amiss with the old" (McLaughlin, 1996a, p. 9).

Institutional fit has also been defined as legitimacy by some scholars. A president, to be successful, must achieve and maintain legitimacy in five different areas: individual, institutional, environmental, technical, and moral (Bornstein, 2003, pp. 25–42). Technical and moral legitimacy correspond to the factors my interviewees noted in discussing failed presidencies. A president gains a high level of technical legitimacy by exercising strong management skills and by leading others toward well–informed, inclusive visions for the institution. High moral legitimacy is attained by presidents who behave ethically and transparently in reaching decisions. Environmental legitimacy and technical legitimacy can sometimes be seen as something of a paradox. A successful president must balance the need to develop new visions and directions for the institution while at the same time respecting and preserving its institutional saga and history (Guskin & Marcy, 2002). This endeavor has to be carefully balanced; a president's vision should not spring from a personal agenda, but rather be built with

the consensus and input of the campus community, with the president leading the process and presenting interpretations of the institutional history and possibilities that the entire community can embrace (Birnbaum, 1992a; Guskin & Marcy, 2002).

A president's relations with the board of trustees are pivotal in establishing and sustaining successful presidencies:

> The care of the presidency is particularly in the hands of the board, and the presidency is the most important single position in a college or university. A board cannot perform much better than its president, although it can be a good deal worse . . . Boards should realize . . . it is harder for a good president to survive a poor board than for a good board to survive a poor president. (Kerr & Gade, 1989, p. 94)

Boards can and should carefully monitor the performance and arc of a president's tenure, and can begin to develop a sense of when even a successful presidential tenure has run its course (Martin & Samels, 2004, pp. 30–36). They can then play an important role in planning for presidential succession and developing the skills of possible internal candidates for the next presidency. A board will have great difficulty selecting the best possible president if it doesn't have a strong collective understanding of its identity, mission, and role within its various environments, or of its institutional saga. Experts in presidential transition note that "a basic reason for failed searches is lack of a single, clear vision, resulting in alternative, sometimes conflicting answers to core questions about . . . priorities" (Martin & Samels, 2004, p. 69). This might seem obvious, but "the practice of deriving presidential criteria from an appraisal of an institution's present condition and future prospects is conventional wisdom in theory and largely ignored in practice" (Neff & Leondar, as cited in Andringa & Splete, 2005, p. 96). The governing board must lead this process and conduct it thoroughly. They do not always fully

realize the breadth of their responsibility in this area. The Association of Governing Boards points out that "the process of presidential selection often derives as much from the subjective intuition of trustees as from the thorough due diligence common in searches for corporative chief executives or in faculty hiring, tenure, or promotion decisions" (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2006, p. 15).

Other insights into presidential success and failure can be found in published studies in peer–reviewed journals over the past thirty years, which fall roughly into three main categories:

- Presidential Functions–insights into specific functions or roles of the presidency and how they are performed
- Presidential Characteristics–information on career paths to the presidency or demographic/socioeconomic characteristics of current presidents
- Presidential Leadership Ability or Style–studies that examined presidential leadership styles or approaches and the various effects and results of those styles

Within and across these three broad categories, three subsets emerged:

- Demographic Groups–studies that examined higher education presidents within a specific group—mainly women or African–American, but also Latino, Catholic, and other Christian; most of these fell within the Presidential Characteristics category
- Community Colleges–there were many studies that focused specifically on community college presidencies, and it could be argued that this subset has been studied more closely and extensively than the higher education presidency as a whole

- International–there were a few articles about international presidencies and the equivalent positions (i.e. vice chancellors)

A number of studies, mainly phenomenological in nature, sought to examine the presidential experiences of a particular group of individuals. Most of this subgroup of literature dealt with women or African–Americans (or African–American women). All the studies in this subgroup, which were published between 2003 and 2010, noted that most higher education presidents are still white males. All noted a certain amount of progress made by a particular group in its growing representation among the highest ranks of academic administration, but also pointed out that higher education has much more work to do to diversify its leadership. Many of the Demographic Groups studies in the wider literature were merely recitations of statistics, often culled from other sources, contrasting variables like length of service in the presidency, age, or marital status, between the group studied and the wider universe of higher education presidents. Several did the same with career path to the presidency, looking at a president's prior positions in a statistical manner but with little explanation or wider context. The studies of greater relevance attempted to add a correlative or hermeneutical layer to presidents' experience that might have shed light on paths to success or failure. Most emphasized, with a seeming air of surprise, that while race and gender were a factor in these individuals' presidential leadership, it was not necessarily a significant obstacle (Ballenger & Austin, 2010; Holmes, 2004; Waring, 2003; Wolverton, Bower, & Maldonado, 2006) and may even have helped them gain their positions: "issues related to race were secondary to how they

managed their overall administrative roles, but may have been primary considerations in their being selected for the positions" (Holmes, 2004, p. 21).

The importance of mentoring, professional networks, and intentional preparation for professional advancement (even for those who did not originally aspire to a presidency) was stressed repeatedly (Campbell, Mueller, & Souza, 2010; Eddy, 2008; Holmes, 2004; Munoz, 2010). Other studies (Stout–Stewart, 2005; Wolverton et al., 2006) sought to identify specific leadership traits and patterns that would support success in women presidents. Educational levels were found to be significant; presidents with doctorates ranked higher on leadership practices that included modeling, inspiring, challenging, enabling, and encouraging, most significantly in inspiring, and those with more experience were significantly higher in enabling (Stout–Stewart, 2005, pp. 309–314). Other authors suggested that "effective leaders hold decidedly similar views of what constitutes effective leadership, regardless of gender or work environment" and found that competence, credibility, and communication were the most important tenets for the female presidents in their study and could therefore be said to be skills needed for success in the higher education presidency (Wolverton et al., 2006, pp. 125, 132).

Community colleges are a strong subset of the higher education literature. The community college is a unique and distinct model within the higher education universe, and its practitioners are well–organized in various professional organizations that sponsor research and writing, in the interests of both advocacy and outcomes improvement. Three community college studies here offer generalizability to other subsets of the higher education universe because they did not focus on the unique features of community college leadership; all three examined

the desired qualifications, leadership traits, and experiences deemed necessary for successful presidents. Trustees' views of successful presidents were examined critically, since "the determination of qualifications and ideal characteristics of a presidential candidate is one of the key roles that a board of trustees plays . . . [but] the criteria that trustees use to make hiring decisions are not as apparent" (Plinske & Packard, 2010, p. 294). Presidents and trustees were surveyed to assess and validate the leadership competencies identified in 2005 by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), identified as organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (Hassan, Dellow, & Jackson, 2010, pp. 181–182). "Substantial agreement" (Hassan et al., p. 185) was found in the responses of presidents and board chairs, both as groups and within the same institution, which the authors noted is "comforting, " since "this overlapping perspective supports an institutional alignment critical for the success of their respective colleges" (p. 188). Results of trustee studies offer an important view into one of the key determinants of presidential success or failure: whether or not trustee expectations are met, no matter how well—or ill–defined or—articulated they may be. Trustees want high–energy, multi–tasking, trustworthy, fiscally savvy, experienced presidents who communicate well, and their stated requirements for presidents have not changed much over 40 years (Plinske & Packard, 2010, p. 308). Trustees form their own perceptions of their ideal presidential candidates during the search process, as do other campus stakeholders, but the consensus description that evolves from even the best–run process may be fairly bland and non–specific. How do presidents

determine the "hidden" qualifications and roles that others expect them to play so that they may meet them, or at least address them in some way?

Some of the same questions were raised in a study of "outstanding–leading" community college presidents (McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999). Fewer than 50% of the outstanding presidents (as identified by their peers through a series of surveys) followed the traditional academic career path and instead came to their presidencies from a position outside higher education. The authors raised this intriguing question about their finding: If outstanding presidents are more likely to come from outside higher education, "does working within an academic environment over a period of years stifle one's willingness to think independently, causing one to be too dependent upon consensus building . . . Is the need to 'keep a lid on controversy' so overwhelming that it smothers strong leadership?" (McFarlin et al., 1995, pp. 25–26). Perhaps a conclusion can be drawn here that a successful presidency requires an independent streak and a willingness both to embrace and support the traditional mores of academe while retaining the ability to take a broader view and move beyond academic tradition.

International universities may be structured differently from those in the US, but their chief executive roles are similar and examining their leadership studies can offer a cross–cultural perspective on success and failure in the higher education presidency. As a whole, the international studies were more sharply focused than those published in the US, and contained many more specific conclusions and recommendations while still citing the areas in which further study was needed.

Several of the international studies sought to determine the nature and priorities of the roles of presidential equivalents in Canadian (Davison & Burge, 2010), UK (Pilbeam & Jamison, 2010), and Australian (Scott, Bell, Coates, & Grebennikov, 2010) universities. Findings ranged from qualitative themes like “balancing daily dissonance, learning experientially to lead, creating learning spaces and seeking moments of grace” (Davison & Burge, 2010, p. 118) to far more concrete results with implications for the success of other higher education leaders. Some of the most important areas of effort for these leaders were managing their senior staff, planning, and developing processes; they measured their own performance based on whether new initiatives were successful, tasks were completed on time, and their students were successful; and the qualities they found most salient to their success were openness and honesty, understanding their own institutions, and being congruent with their values (Scott et al., pp. 406–407). Another UK study emphasized the importance of communication and building relationships to succeed in academic leadership, as well as an echo of Davison and Burge’s “dissonance and grace” dichotomy: “the individual PVC needs to have the capacity to feel comfortable with the tension implicit in a boundary spanning role, in which s/he facilitates the communication between two or more contrasting stakeholders” (Pilbeam & Jamieson, 2010, p. 773).

Defining presidential success or failure is challenging because there is no definitive and objective measure. Tenure in office is one measure sometimes used as a rough indication of success, since some unsuccessful presidents leave office quickly, or at least before intended according to the definition given earlier in this review. A German study (Robken, 2007) found that presidents at the smallest German universities (fewer than 1038 students) had significantly

shorter tenures than did those at larger universities. Those universities that spent more on teaching enjoyed longer presidencies; those that spent more on research had shorter tenures. Presidents of larger institutions may be better able to weather discontent and conflict on campus because the institution is more diffuse. Institutions that have more money to spend on teaching may be able to keep students and faculty happier, reducing the likelihood of campus dissension that could cause a president to leave or be driven out, or it might simply mean that the institution has a solid resource base, giving the president more room to maneuver and pursue the institution's agenda (Robken, 2007, pp. 145–150).

The relationship between institutional outcomes and presidential success is also intertwined yet difficult to establish in any direct, causal manner. In one of the few studies in this review to link executive performance with student outcomes (Sala, 2003), the direct reports of a cross–section of UK principals (equivalent to US community college presidents) were asked to assess their principal's leadership style and the organizational climate of the institution. The principals were classified within six managerial types (coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetting, and coaching) and the institutions were assessed for perceived flexibility, responsibility, standards, rewards, clarity, and team commitment. The results of these assessments were then correlated with various measures of publicly available college and student performance routinely gathered by the British government (pp. 176–178). The study found that "principals' managerial styles were moderately associated with college performance measures," (p. 180), and that the authoritative style had the strongest association, with a significant correlation with retention, inspectorate ratings, and campus climate. The true

significance of the correlation between management style and climate, however, probably lies in the fact that "organizational climate showed significant positive correlation with all measures of performance" (p. 181). The implication is that principals (or presidents) who lead their institutions in certain ways can create a climate that in turn contributes significantly to student success. The two recommended styles of leadership for higher education CEOs who wish to positively impact student success were authoritative, defined as "gives long–term direction and vision, accepts input, and gives balanced feedback," and coaching, which "involves the long–term development of others, empowers others to learn and develop, and gives feedback on performance for improvement" (p. 176).

The Institutional Leadership Project (ILP) was a landmark 1986–1987 study conducted by the National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance. Presidents at 32 institutions across all Carnegie classifications formed the bulk of the data. Several studies in the early 1990s were drawn from this data and formed a baseline for research in this field. Studies generated from the ILP data examined presidents' cognitive complexity (Bensimon, 1989); their assessment of their own effectiveness (Birnbaum, 1990); the learning they drew from their mistakes (Neumann, 1990); and their aspirations for institutional quality (Birnbaum, 1994). Some of the data was rounded out with constituent perceptions for a fuller picture of presidential success (Fujita, 1994).

In the ILP–based studies, presidents with a higher level of cognitive complexity, defined by their use of more than one of Bolman and Deal's (expanded by Birnbaum) four cognitive frames–bureaucratic, collegial, political, and symbolic–were found to more effectively navigate

complex institutions and environments (Bensimon, 1989), and more actively seek feedback and data to assess their performance (Birnbaum, 1990). Presidents who actively sought information and feedback from multiple sources and who consciously tried to use data to anticipate and resolve problems might appear most effective to themselves and to others “in the process culture of colleges and universities which must substitute symbolic administrative activities in the absence of empirical measures of effectiveness” (Birnbaum, 1990, p. 34).

Cognitive complexity also played a role in presidents’ assessments of their own mistakes and of the quality of their institutions (Neumann, 1990; Birnbaum, 1994). Presidents who identified mistakes in the ILP interviews noted more errors earlier in their tenure, and successful applications of linear, adaptive, and interpretive strategies helped to determine the level of impact those errors had on a presidency (Neumann, 1990, pp. 396–398). The study raised the question: do more presidents report “rookie” errors because any newcomer is bound to make more mistakes, or is it because “presidential learning also stops after the earliest years in office—and along with learning, growth”? (Neumann, 1990, p. 400). To be successful, presidents must view their institutions through multiple frames, seek constant feedback, continually learn from their office and hone their strategies.

Managing relationships with key constituencies is one of the most important roles of a higher education president, and several studies examined presidential effectiveness through the lens of particular constituencies. Three constituencies are often regarded as key to a president’s success: trustees, faculty, and administrators (Birnbaum, 1992a). Since effectiveness is subjective, and “an awareness of the differing values among the subcultures on a campus has

important implications for understanding what is expected of a president and why he or she gains or loses support among different constituencies on campus," (Fujita, 1994, p. 88), constituent work from the ILP institutions revealed that a willingness to be influenced, competence, and respect for institutional culture were the most important determinants of presidential quality for trustees, faculty, and other senior administrators. To trustees and administrators, competence and outcomes tended to be most important; faculty (resoundingly!) valued a willingness to be influenced and free flow of information (Fujita, 1994, pp. 86–87). Faculty have their own particular lens and a key role to play in whether a presidency is successful, so it is incumbent upon a president to understand which faculty norms should not be violated and communicate actions and intentions clearly. Inviolable norms, the violation of which can bring a particularly strong reaction from the faculty, can include taking privileges to which the president is not entitled or interfering in those areas normally under the influence of the faculty; presenting the institution in a negative light through personal actions or unnecessarily creating bad feelings among stakeholders; failing to communicate effectively among stakeholder groups; failure to respect other points of view; or outright financial or moral misconduct. Admonitory, or less strongly held, norms can include insensitivity to stakeholder concerns; inaccuracy or a failure to heed stated policies; or aloofness (Fleming, 2010, pp. 256–261).

The other key constituency for presidential success and failure is trustees, since "hiring presidents and evaluating their performances is part of the most important role trustees perform for their institutions," (Michael, Schwartz, & Balraj, 2001, p. 332). One challenge is

meeting trustee expectations is that the criteria by which trustees evaluate presidents may not always be clearly stated or understood, and that trustees come from such disparate backgrounds that achieving consensus may be difficult. By and large, however, trustees find that

> Effective presidents are quick learners . . . [who] recognize the sources of higher education knowledge and are actively connected with these sources. Effective presidents are competent educators who are skillfully framing institutional issues within a larger context. An effective president is an influential president . . . Effective presidents take time to know their trustees and foster positive relationships with them. Effective presidents cultivate positive relationships with faculty, staff, and students. Effective presidents not only champion planning activities, they use the planning process as a tool to educate the campus constituents and rally support for institutional mission. (Michael et al., 2001, pp. 344–345)

Other studies have found a certain agreement between presidents and trustees on the relative importance of presidential roles; in one, the top ranked role for both groups was Visionary and the second and third for the presidents and third and second for the board chairs were Trustee Rapport Builder/Advisor and PR Specialist/Image Builder (Cote, 1985, pp. 665–668). Consensus between presidents and their chairs is crucial to the success of a presidency. Presidents need to seek clear guidance from the board on the priorities of the position and the institution; boards need to maintain their own internal consensus and impart that clearly to the president (Cote, 1985; Hassan et al., 2010). The board chair is instrumental in building consensus among the members and then conveying clear expectations to the president.

The trustee perceptions in these studies are similar to what is expected of presidents by other key stakeholders, since there tends to be broad agreement among campus constituencies about what makes a president effective (McGoey, 2007). While relationships with the governing body and the faculty are considered of primary importance, choosing excellent senior staff to

run the institution is also among the chief expectations of a successful president:

> The president must have a keen understanding of management and a leadership style that fosters the selection of quality personnel who are empowered to carry out the daily administrative tasks required to meet the president's objectives and goals . . . while the president must be knowledgeable about issues pertaining to higher education and the institution, the president can rely on appointed staff to keep the chief executive abreast of issues [to be] addressed." (McGoey, 2007, p. 101)

Faculty support is one way to frame the arc of a presidency, since "new" presidents (in office three years or less) tend to enjoy much higher support from faculty than do "old" presidents (Birnbaum, 1992b, p. 4). Most presidents are initially perceived to be stronger than their predecessors and since faculty most likely participated in the search process, everyone is eager to see their choice validated. However, Birnbaum suggests that presidencies will move from those initial perceptions into one of three trajectories: modal, failed, and exemplary Presidencies. Continued communication with faculty is the key to enjoying their continued support and achieving an exemplary presidency, and "exemplary presidents maintain faculty support by sustaining over time the enthusiasm, institutional commitment, desire to interact with faculty, and openness to influence that typifies new presidents" (Birnbaum, 1992b, pp. 12–15). They remain open; they do not limit their interaction to their administrative colleagues; they resist the urge "to seek information that supports their own positions [that] makes it possible for presidents to become even more certain of their positions as they make poor decisions" (p. 17).

Examining specific roles of a higher education president was the topic of several further studies. One of the strongest and most directly relevant studies reviewed here sought to tie

college presidents' strategic leadership styles to specific measures of institutional success: enrollment, resources, and academic reputation (Neumann & Neumann, 2000). Presidents' self–assessment of their visioning, focusing, and implementing skills were used to create eight "strategic leadership types," ranging from those who scored high on all three measures (Integrators) to those who scored low on all three (Maintainers).

The authors also took a baseline measure of each institution's enrollment, financial resources (tuition and endowment income), and academic quality (gleaned from ratings in established publications), and then a second measure five years later (Neumann & Neumann, 2000, pp. 97–101). In striking conclusions, a conditional probability analysis yielded the result that 93% of colleges led by Maintainers (those with self–reported low visioning, focusing, and implementing skills) were likely to be in decline. The same sharp pattern held true for those institutions that had experienced growth in both enrollment and resources (44 of the 158); all the presidents in the study who had identified as Integrators and Net Casters (high visioning and implementing, low focusing) led successful institutions (pp. 106–107). The implications for presidents and those who employ them are clear: boards and search committees of institutions that want to thrive should find themselves an Integrator or a Net Caster when searching for a president. Those satisfied to remain where they are should hire Maintainers, or perhaps Implementors. The challenge for those who would maximize the chances of successful presidencies is to develop ways to reliably gauge presidential strategic leadership style before hire, and to somehow predict the ways in which an individual's pre–existing or theoretical style will mesh with the campus community and challenges yet unknown.

Despite the fact that many presidents report a high level of satisfaction and job performance for themselves, and value stability and good relations on campus more than they do competition with other institutions (Birnbaum, 1990; Perrakis et al., 2011), improving the standing and reputations of their institutions remains a key concern. Despite presidential rhetoric to the contrary, "most colleges and universities are neither well–known nor rich; they enroll a nonselective student body and the performance of their graduates is unremarkable" (Birnbaum, 1994, p. 71). Therefore, "presidents of upwardly mobile private institutions . . . seek to become more selective," and, if they are near the "top" of their classification are more likely to want to move to the next tier (Brint, Riddle, & Hanneman, 2006, pp. 240–242). Ambitious and vigorous presidential leadership is necessary to reposition the institution: "an institution that is ready for change would show clear evidence of structural strength in enrollments, finances, and students' academic qualifications relative to others in its category and would have leaders with strongly vertical visions of the future" (Brint et al., 2006, p. 247).

As with perceptions of the presidency, however, presidents' definitions of the quality and aspirations of their institutions are difficult to delineate because they can be measured in so many ways, including Birnbaum's three main themes: Meritocratic, Social, and Individualistic:

> Those holding the meritocratic view evaluate quality based on institutional conformity to universalistic professional and scholarly norms and use the academic profession as a reference group. Presidents who hold the social view consider the degree to which the institution satisfies the needs of important collective constituents and audiences and use a community of some type as a reference group . . . [P]residents who have an individualistic view emphasize the contributions that the institution makes to the personal growth of students (and occasionally to faculty). (Birnbaum, 1994, pp. 74–75)

Slightly less than half of the presidents in Birnbaum's study measured quality for their institutions in meritocratic terms, followed by smaller numbers who emphasized the social or individualistic themes. Like presidents who must prioritize their roles, every institution has finite resources and must make tradeoffs. Allocating more money to expand curricular offerings may mean less to spend on community outreach or student support, for instance. In making these decisions, it is important to weigh all three measures of quality against the mission, values, institutional type, and capacity of an individual institution. Birnbaum proposed a "quality cube" (1994, p. 79) in which colleges and universities could be gauged and plotted according to their success and emphasis on all three measures. Successful presidents must work with their campus community to decide what balance of the three axes is most important for an institution and what must be de–emphasized to attain it.

Resources are necessary to accomplish any of this, and 21st century presidents must be successful fundraisers (Cote, 1985; Nicholson, 2007), one of the few facets of the role that can typically be measured empirically. Successful fundraisers can apply the principles of leadership developed by Avolio, and move beyond the initial stages of relationships with major donors, which are typically transactional in nature, to one of inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence, in which the donor becomes a partner in creating a new vision and path for the institution (Nicholson, 2007, pp. 261–268). The growing number of presidents entering the office from outside traditional academic career paths may find this easier to do than past presidents, since leaders from outside colleges and universities move faster and come from a background in which tangible, measurable success is

required. These “nontraditional” presidents can be quite successful if they are mindful of the importance of a “sincere concern, passion, and vision for higher education and for the mission of the institution” and create a strong leadership team to handle the academic and other issues with which they may have little prior experience (Delabbio & Palmer, 2009, pp. 10–12).

The studies here have all discussed various aspects of the higher education presidency that can impact presidential success, but there are few studies that tackle head–on the issue of failure. Harris and Hartley (2011) do so in a fascinating case study of “witch–hunting” at an institution they labeled Crucible University. Theirs is not a study of the higher education presidency per se; however, their use of a higher education case throws into sharp focus the processes and institutional dynamics at work in one example of a failed presidency. This presidency ultimately failed as a result of three factors: poor fit between the president’s leadership style and the culture and values of the institution; communication that was incomplete, sometimes actively hindered, driven by what the researchers term the “ideologies” at play within two institutional camps (Harris & Hartley, 2011, pp. 708–713); and a failure to build institutional consensus around the college’s strategic direction and goals. As was seen in Fleming’s (2010) study, every institution has norms that successful presidents must understand and honor; violation of those norms will cost a leader support and legitimacy. When this president violated Crucible’s norms, the subsequent ideological division “set up a dichotomous scenario…in which ‘citizens’ could be in favor of integrity or the president, but not both” (Harris & Hartley, 2011, p. 714). Harris and Hartley indicate that this president might have enjoyed success had he built a case and wider campus support for the athletics expansion from the

outset, consulted with others openly before making the decision about the student's grade, communicated openly and honestly with the community when the controversy started, or built a stronger and more trusting, collaborative relationship with his academic dean. He did none of those things, and his presidency failed as a result.

New presidents are frequently expected to make changes and address existing and past challenges, real or perceived, and often before they have had the opportunity to truly understand the culture and their new role (Guskin, 1996). At institutions in crisis, there are often three distinct stages to a "turnaround" led by a president: restoring financial stability, marketing and branding of a new and forward–looking identity, and strengthening academic programs and the institutional culture (MacTaggart, 2007, pp. 3–8). Some guidelines for new presidents developing change in turnaround institutions are:

- Learn what the challenges are, prioritize them, and choose some strengths on which to build;
- Understand the culture and the climate on campus, particularly of those who are worried or grieving the changes that come with a new administration;
- Earn the community's trust;
- Honor the mission and values of the institution, and root proposed changes in the mission;
- Show respect for the past successes and efforts of the institution;
- Set the best possible personal example, especially if the institution is in financial crisis;
- Be persistent, strong, and brave;
- Be open, honest, and transparent, and take every opportunity to communicate with constituencies about proposed changes and the reasons for them. (Shaw, 2007, pp. 107–110)

Adept and skillful communication, carefully calibrated to the campus culture, is seen throughout the literature as one of the most essential skills of a successful president. This is directly related to the multiplicity of perspectives and agendas within the campus community; a

president who can successfully interpret events and their meaning for different institutional audiences can draw a community together in pursuit of its goals (Birnbaum, 1988). Soliciting and listening carefully to the input of campus constituencies is a key element in successful presidential communication (Birnbaum, 1992a), as is deep reflection on the input given, as well as the humility for a president to realize that many people in the community have an important contribution to make to institutional success (Guskin & Marcy, 2002). Presidents must be motivated by a genuine desire to serve their institutions, not their own agendas, and "must possess a combination of leadership virtues . . . that are formed by a personal grounding in values and beliefs, create an ability to have and make connections with key constituencies . . . and inform a broad orientation to the world that will serve a university" (Nelson, 2009, pp. 113–114).

Another common theme in the literature is the necessity for the successful president to assemble and lead a strong work team of senior leaders who can skillfully and proactively manage the business of the institution while allowing the president to attend to the visionary and symbolic aspects of the role (Birnbaum, 1988; Guskin, 1996; McGoey, 2007). Some research indicates that a president's management style with her team (directive or collaborative) has less impact on institutional perceptions and outcomes than does the presence on the team of competent administrators (Birnbaum, 1992a).

Even after a thorough review of the literature, I still have found no definitive definition of presidential failure, and the suggestions for presidential success often apply only to certain aspects of the role or are outdated. However, the preponderance of the evidence available

would suggest that a successful 21st century president is communicative, collaborative, visionary, skilled at fundraising and external relationships, an astute interpreter of campus culture and history, cognitively complex, an astute navigator of trustee and faculty relationships, and an adept manager of her executive team. Failed presidencies are more likely to be characterized by clashes between a president and key constituencies, misreadings of campus expectations, poor communication, a failure to effectively interpret the institution's past, present, and future, individual rather than collective visions and plans, and poorly managed relationships with the governing board.

The Literature on Institutional Saga and Culture

Colleges and universities are unique social systems with their own histories, cultures, and traditions. Many of them, particularly the small private institutions of New England from which the cases for this study will be drawn, are united by what Clark (1972) termed the organizational saga in higher education: "a collective understanding of unique accomplishment in a formally established group" (p. 178). They share a founding story, often with a founding president remembered as charismatic and successful beyond any successors; they share a set of institutional values; and they are bound by myths and traditions that have evolved over the years to bind the members of the campus community, past and present. In Clark's conception, organizational saga has five elements: personnel (most notably long–serving faculty); program (unique academic offerings or practices); social base (supporters outside the institution, often alumni and donors); student subculture; and imagery, or institutional self–belief (Clark, 1972, pp.181–182). The institution's self–identity and its image, both internal and external, also rest

on this heritage and saga (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). A university's identity is "the central and ongoing representations of a university that suggest shard beliefs, values, and its organizational culture, which over time create metaphors for its unique qualities" (MacDonald, 2012, p. 154). It is this identity, and this saga, that informs, and in some cases predicts, the arc of the institution's presidency. The saga informs the choice of new leadership when presidents are selected, and can also largely set the parameters for what an individual will be able to achieve once in the office (Birnbaum, 1992a).

The cultural identity of a college or university can be expressed on several levels. Artifacts and rituals can be observed on almost every campus. Buildings are named after former campus leaders; statements of mission are proudly displayed on mailing materials and even signs around campus; members of the community engage in the same rituals each semester. However, to understand the culture of the institution is to acknowledge that artifacts and rituals take on many meanings, often different to the individuals who experience them. The same is true with the stated mission and core values of an institution. Although they may have been established through a campus–wide process and referred to in every official campus publication, members of the community will interpret them differently—or sometimes disregard them altogether. Behaviors will not always be consonant with stated values, and individuals will interact with the university culture is ways that are determined by their own experiences, values, and assumptions (Schein, 2010).

A new presidency can be one of the most profound changes an institution of higher education will face, particularly at small schools where a president's actions can directly impact

the day–to–day work of members of the community. There may be a period of wariness, or even grief, as the community struggles to take the measure of the new president and adapt to the changes ahead (Shaw, 2007). In a system with many disparate stakeholders, effective and lasting change needs to be structured within the social and organizational realities of the organization (Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipedi, 1994). Presidents must consciously invoke the symbolism and traditions inherent in the institutional saga (Cohen & March, 1986; Gioia, et al., 1994) as they work with constituents to enact the organizational agenda. Although aspects of an institution's identity may be subject to evolution within carefully constructed change processes (Gioia & Thomas, 1996), new initiatives, programs, and new presidents become a part of the saga.

Three characteristics of organizational identity that are particularly salient to the study of colleges and universities are central mission, distinctiveness from other institutions, and history (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Aust, 2004). Higher education institutions place great value on mission and purpose, and strive to distinguish themselves through their programs and character in an effort to attract students, scholars, and funding. Their organizational identity in the present is informed by the history, traditions, and myths that have grown into their institutional saga. And because of the nature of the role, it is the president who becomes the living symbol of this saga (Guskin, 1996) and who must effectively communicate it to those both in and outside the institution.

To understand the presidential arc of a given institution over time and across multiple presidencies, it is essential to place one's understanding of events and individuals within the

ongoing saga of the institution. A case study is an optimal method for such a study (Aust, 2004), because it allows the researcher to interpret multiple realities within a bounded system. Gaining an understanding of a complex culture requires high involvement on the part of the researcher, who must move beyond the surface and demographic understanding that can be gained from artifacts and distant observations to more sustained interaction with the culture's members (Schein, 2010). The researcher must carefully interpret the multiple realities of members of the campus community in a process that will be inherently qualitative, although supported by campus artifacts and enrollment and financial data.

Chapter III: Methodology

Bentz and Shapiro refer to the role of a researcher as an “applied philosopher” (1998, p. 31). Research is not merely a mechanical process of gathering data to answer a given question or to explain a given phenomenon. It is essential to examine one’s preconceptions and assumptions to construct the best possible methodology to pursue a research question based on the data one is seeking and the question one seeks to address.

The research question of this study is: *What factors in presidential success or failure can be identified by comparing the arcs and touchpoints of the presidency at small private colleges and universities*? In constructing a research design, there are three levels to be examined (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, pp. 5–6):

- Political/purpose: What is the researcher trying to achieve with the research?
- Why is the researcher seeking to answer a given question? Why does the researcher, and why will others, find the research worthwhile? Who is the intended audience?
- Philosophical/paradigm: What does the researcher believe about the nature of reality and knowledge? Does the researcher believe that reality can be objectively determined, or must knowledge always be situated within a given context?
- Technical/method: What research methods will enable the researcher to gain the knowledge that is sought? What type of data is necessary—quantitative or qualitative data, or a combination of both?

The literature review in the previous chapter demonstrated that there is little published material on specific factors in presidential failure, only poorly integrated material on

presidential success, and nothing on the arc, or history, of the presidency at individual institutions. This study will begin to close that gap in the literature with a comparative case study conducted from a social constructivist, qualitative approach. As stated in Chapter I, this research has a very specific purpose: to identify some of the factors in presidential success and failure, and by doing so, to better inform higher education practitioners about ways to make more presidencies successful. The audience for the research will be presidents, trustees, search consultants, and others in higher education who aspire to a presidency or who work for presidents and want their institutions to thrive.

Choice of Social Constructivist Qualitative Research

Examining the presidential arc at colleges and universities is an inherently qualitative task, as we have seen that no objective standard for presidential success or failure exists. Quantitative research seeks to explain, predict, and generalize; qualitative research tries to comprehend, interpret and contextualize (Gelo, Braakman, & Benetka, 2008, p. 271). Qualitative research seeks to make subjective sense of the lived experience of research participants, and the questions posed by qualitative researchers tend to be more open–ended and often evolve from the data gathered. It is an inductive process (Creswell, 2009). While it was important to use empirical data like financial and enrollment information to support the nature of the presidential arc at each institution and the conclusions drawn in this study, the study is neither statistical nor experimental in nature. Study data has been drawn from the institutional histories and the perceptions of the individuals involved, conducted through the lens of their natural

setting. The end result is a set of stories from which it is then possible to draw parallels and conclusions (McMillan & Wergin, 2010).

A presidential arc is a social construct, made up of many events over the course of multiple presidencies to which meaning must be assigned, often retrospectively, by those who lived them. Often the meaning of these events, and certainly their continuing consequences, can only be assessed in hindsight. Colleges and universities are composed of many stakeholders with differing, and often competing, lenses through which to view the presidency (Birnbaum, 1988; Cohen & March, 1986). Therefore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of a presidential arc it was necessary to gather data from those who experienced the events in that setting, and to interpret the themes that arose from that data, through a qualitative research process. Participants draw their understandings of the presidencies of their institutions from their own social interactions in the workplace and their own understanding of their lived experiences, so this study approaches the research question from a social constructivist perspective (Creswell, 2009; Robson, 2002). Constructivism, sometimes closely linked with naturalism, holds that there are multiple realities constructed between participants in a given phenomenon and informed by values and context (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). A researcher cannot hope to identify objective "truth," but can and must carefully interpret the experience of others, while always acknowledging her own existing pre–conceptions and beliefs.

Choice of a Case Study Approach

A comparative case study is the most appropriate method to explore this research question. Since higher education presidencies exist within the loosely bound systems of colleges

and universities, they present unique cases composed of many narratives and events (Miller & Salkind, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Presidential arcs are a complex social construct resulting from the interactions of the incumbent, the culture and the history of the institution, and the external environment. The case, in this study the presidential arc of a single institution, is the unit of study, not any of the individual factors or events that shaped it (Fitzgerald & Dopson, 2009; Stake, 1995). This case study is instrumental (rather than intrinsic), because cases were chosen to illustrate the complexities of the questions to be addressed, within a defined universe of possible cases (Stake, 1995).

Choice of Specific Cases

Possible cases were identified through a small interview study. The case universe was limited to small private institutions in New England. Only institutions with fewer than 3000 students were considered, since smaller institutions tend to have more personal dynamics at play, and their presidents can exercise more direct influence over their schools. The emphasis on New England was both a matter of personal interest and the need to choose case institutions from within the same broad geographical area to allow for clearer comparisons and analysis. Institutions in the same or neighboring states share the same physical, cultural, and economic environment, to a certain extent. The study was limited to private institutions, because public colleges and universities have different funding and political challenges that can impact their presidential and institutional successes and failures. Examining those external elements is beyond the scope of this study.

In a small interview study in preparation for this research, interviews were conducted by telephone with five individuals with extensive experience in higher education associations and accrediting bodies in New England. The interviews were semi–structured to enable the participants to freely share their opinions and insights and to allow for follow–up questions based on their responses. Interviewees were provided with the questions in advance. The questions were:

- What do you think can be learned by examining the history, or arc, of the presidency at an individual institution?
- What do you think can be learned by comparing presidential arcs between institutions?
- Do you believe that there are links between a college or university's presidential history and its institutional progress (in terms of enrollment, financial stability, public profile, academic standards and programs, etc.)?
- How do you think the higher education presidency has changed over the time you have been working in this field?
- Do you know of any colleges or universities that have presidential arcs that would merit further study?
- To whom would you speak within a campus community (past and present) to get a full picture of its presidential history?
- What other data—institutional or environmental—would you also examine to round out the picture?

- How do you define success or failure in the higher education presidency?

The interviewees' responses were thoughtful and extensive. Based on their own experiences, they validated the approach of examining presidential arcs to determine factors in presidential success and failure. Since the "locus of positive change in building great institutions rests with the presidency," (Interviewee E), several of the interviewees believed that one can almost "trace the development of the college through the presidency" (Interviewee A). New presidents bring new programs and ideas, some of which may be transformative for the institution (although others may be mere flashes, never to be institutionalized). Each presidency represents a new chapter in the institution's history, and examining these presidencies can show "the varied and changing competitive circumstances of an institution, changing expectations of leadership over time, changes in board and board leadership" (Interviewee D).

The study participants also believed that examining an institution's presidential history would be a useful tool for new presidents seeking to maximize their own and their institution's success, since new presidents have the opportunity to "learn from the mistakes of others and be more alert and astute at appraising the situation they're going into and the stage of change and attitudes toward change the institution is in" (Interviewee E). The same is true for governing boards, search consultants and others involved in choosing a new president.

Interviewees were also questioned about the use of the comparative case study method and whether comparing the presidential arcs of different institutions would be valid and useful. There was a general agreement that this would be a valid approach, although care should be taken to ensure some level of similarity between institutions (geographical, size, mission)

chosen as cases. Despite the level of similarity or difference between two institutions, however, "as in a medieval tapestry or presidential arcs, there are some persistent themes" (Interviewee E). The best way to draw comparisons would be to identify critical "touchpoints"—changes or themes in an institution's history or leadership—that would be common among institutions even when the specific circumstances differed. Examining those touchpoints would make it possible to draw useful conclusions about the interplay of presidential history and institutional culture and environment.

The interviewees offered many suggestions of possible institutions to study, examples they felt had interesting histories or unique approaches to current challenges in higher education. Five schools, all in Vermont and New Hampshire, emerged as the strongest possibilities:

College A is a nationally–known progressive institution with a storied and troubled presidential history, due in large part to its fundamental value of democratic governance. Until the early 2000s, College A had both a campus residential program and an array of low–residency programs for adult and graduate students. Each program had its own faculty, and the faculty of the campus program had a contentious relationship with a series of presidents, largely because their vision of the institution's democratic and progressive past was increasingly unsustainable with modern students. It had become "a place with a storied history that at one time was truly special and over the years wasn't" (private communication, Interviewee B). Individuals from this institution agreed to participate in this study, and its presidential arc is discussed in Chapter IV (Dewey College).

College B is a Vermont institution that has been “successful in adapting its programs to changing needs and desires, successful in building on the Vermont brand” (private communication, Interviewee B). As this study began, the president of College B announced his retirement and did not choose to speak with a researcher while the search for his successor was underway.

University C is in New Hampshire and has struggled in recent years to define itself and its mission, opening new campuses as far afield as Arizona. Various attempts to diversity its programs have not brought the enrollment and financial base the institution had hoped, and it faces a bit of a crossroads. Its current president greeted the prospect of participation in this study with some enthusiasm, but abruptly changed his mind after what he described as a “very directive” meeting of his Board of Trustees. A few months later, this president announced a plan to eliminate six academic programs, restructure student financial aid, eliminate student health insurance, and restructure $42 million of long–term debt for the institution. Several vice presidential positions have been advertised, following a number of departures from the president’s cabinet.

College D is in Vermont, and was suggested by an interviewee for a “strategic failure” in partnering with a local ski resort, an undertaking driven largely by a non–traditional president with little understanding of higher education (private communication, Interviewee E). Like College B, D has capitalized on the “Vermont brand,” but like A, struggles with the relevance of its traditional academic emphases as curricular trends change. Despite the fact that College D’s

history and initiatives have appeared in various publications over the last few years, the current president declined to participate or cooperate with this research.

College E, in New Hampshire, was cited in the national media in 2012 and 2013 when faculty donated part of their salaries to prevent staffing reductions, and was said by interviewees to suffer over the years from a lack of strategic vision across several presidencies and to be “intoxicated with the culture of crisis” (private communication, Interviewee E). Their president also declined to participate.

Three cases were needed to do an effective study of this type, so these access issues were highly problematic. Using only two cases would make it more difficult to identify common touchpoints; a third would make patterns more identifiable and relevant. More than three cases could make the study unmanageable and not allow the sort of deep and reflective analysis this topic demands—although, given the access issues, that did not loom as a prospective problem.

In moving farther afield to choose new case institutions, I sought schools whose names had been suggested by my prior interviewees although they did not make my initial list of five, and I took another look at the institution I chose for the pilot study (Northern College). Practical College, also located in Vermont, was chosen because of similar curricular emphases to Northern, a shared emphasis on experiential education with both Northern and Dewey, and the learner–centered approach that is also a hallmark of a Dewey education. I had not originally intended to use Northern College as a case in both my pilot and my dissertation study, but it fit well with Practical and Dewey in many ways. It was located in the same geographical area; it was a rural institution and its location shaped its presidential arc and institutional history; it was

roughly the same age as Dewey and as Practical, if one counts the time Practical spent as a boy's school that then evolved into a higher education institution; and it shared some of the previously mentioned curricular emphases with both institutions. And—this is not to be underestimated, given the difficulties I had encountered gaining access to other institutions—I had access to Northern and understood its history. However, had Northern not been a good parallel to the other institutions for the purposes of the dissertation study, I would have kept looking for another institution. I added another Northern interviewee to expand the pilot study for the purposes of the dissertation.

In all prospective cases, I began with the current president, whose perspective was vital not just to the study but to potential access and contact information for former presidents and trustees. Confidentiality was assured at every step, not just for interviewees and their responses but for the case institutions themselves; all three of the cases in Chapter IV are described with synonyms. Every effort was made to minimize the potential disruption and/or invasion of privacy of interviewees being asked to described their lived experiences with a current or former employer (Stake, 1995, pp. 57–60). However, I suspect that at institutions already facing challenges, the topic of presidential success and failure is one that feels threatening to some presidents, and one that some would prefer go unexamined by an outsider. In one case, a trustee advised the current president not to participate.

The three case institutions in Chapter IV all agreed to participate at least in part because of a personal connection I had with each institution, which raises concerns of researcher bias and construct validity (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Both data and methodological triangulation were

used to control for any possible personal bias. Interviewees were invited to suggest other interviewees, in most cases individuals with whom I had no prior acquaintance. Information given by the interviewees about changes in governance, enrollment, or finances was verified as much as possible through institutional documentation, archival records, and press accounts. And my prior contact with these institutions was either limited (Practical College) or more than ten years prior to the study (Northern and Dewey Colleges). I disclosed my history with each institution to each interviewee in emails requesting participation and at the beginning of each interviewee; none of them indicated any concern.

Pilot Study

The interview questions for the case studies were developed from the information gathered in the interview study mentioned above and tested through a pilot case. The pilot examined the presidential arc at a small private institution in Northern New York (given the pseudonym Northern College and described in Chapter IV).

The pilot tested both the questions and the interview techniques to be used in this study. It was determined that the questions generated enough data about the institution's presidential arc to make later analysis possible. The first and broadest question (*Please trace the history of the presidency at your institution as you recall or understand it*) elicited the longest and most comprehensive response in each interview. This proved effective, since it was possible to see the presidential history emerging in a chronological and easily– grasped manner. In several cases, when the subsequent questions were asked much of the answer had already been given in response to the first question, but the additional questions allowed for reflection on

specific points of the institutional narrative. The broad and open–ended questions generated a good deal of data, all from the point of view of the interviewee. There were many opportunities for follow–up questions to ensure that a full picture was emerging, particularly after the first interview, when follow–up questions were designed to allow multiple perspectives on the perceptions of earlier interviewees. I had done some preliminary research on the names and dates of past presidents, the institution's transition from two–to four–year programs, and its financial and enrollment data, which was valuable in structuring follow–up questions. At the end of each interview, the participants were asked if there was anything else that they wanted to share or felt that I should know, but by that point the questions had elicited all the information they had to share.

The open–ended questions, and the interviewees' candid responses, enabled me to identify the level of perceived success of each of the institution's eight presidents (three were deemed successful by the interviewees), whether each president was successful by the definition I developed in the interview study, and the major institutional and environmental factors that impacted each presidency. This demonstrated that this would be an effective set of questions and techniques for additional case institutions.

Qualitative research interviewing techniques were used. In qualitative research interviewing, questions are open and allow for the emergence of a detailed narrative based on the interviewee's lived experience. The interviewer must have a broad knowledge of the subject, with enough depth to permit conversational follow–up (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews were semi–structured, with a list of questions provided to

the interviewees in advance to allow them to reflect on the topic. Responsive interviewing techniques of building rapport and keeping the encounter conversational were used to maximum the flow of information and interviewee comfort (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The interviews were conducted by telephone, which presented the need for some accommodations. In telephone interviews it is not possible to read physical cues in the interviewee, and it is more difficult to build a rapport. Therefore, preliminary emails were exchanged with the interviewees setting out the purpose and structure of the interviews and inviting questions or concerns in advance (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Research on the efficacy of telephone compared to in–person interviews yields mixed results. There is some indication that there is little difference in the amount of quality and data gathered; other studies give a small edge to in–person interviews because they can be conducted at a more leisurely and interactive pace, yielding more usable data (Shuy, 2001). In this context, when the questions were available in advance and no designated time limit was given, there seemed to be no particular drawback to the use of the telephone. The telephone interviews were not recorded, but extensive notes were taken. Note–taking was actually facilitated by the use of the telephone, since it was possible to write without making eye contact or being otherwise concerned that the interviewee would perceive a lack of attention.

In the dissertation study, interviews were requested with the current president of each institution, a current board member, and at least one former president where possible. (This proved possible for Practical and Dewey, but not for Northern.) Suggestions for at least one faculty and one administrative interviewee were solicited from the president, and then again

from those interviewees to attempt to triangulate information between respondents. Length of service of the interviewees varied; all interviewees were associated with their institutions long enough to offer a perspective on multiple presidencies (except for the current presidents of Practical and Dewey Colleges).

Data Collection

Only minor changes to the question list were needed for the dissertation study. The same semi–structured, qualitative research interviewing used in the pilot was employed, which afforded the opportunity to use additional questions generated by interview responses. Telephone interviews were conducted when necessary due to distance and schedules. I have visited all three campuses, and indeed lived on campus at both Northern and Dewey Colleges in the 1990s.

Notes were taken during all interviews, which were not recorded. The decision whether to record research interviews can be based on the following factors: the topic, the potential effects on the interviewee, and the preference of the researcher (Hayes & Mattimoe, 2004). In this case, interviewees were asked to reflect honestly on the presidencies of their institutions and how they perceive events in their workplace. It is a topic that may induce some concern and mild discomfort, which is why all the participants were promised confidentiality. However, in order to receive honest data about participants' perceptions and beliefs, every step was taken to minimize interviewees' discomfort or any possible fear of consequences from participating in this research. This issue was raised during the pilot study, when one of the participants and another individual who declined to be interviewed both expressed concern about "going on the

record" either through a tape recording or in attributed quotes. When confidentiality was promised and they were told they would not be taped, one individual agreed to participate candidly, and the other declined for different reasons. To eliminate any possibility that recording the interview will inhibit responses, copious manual notes were taken.

All interviewees were asked the same set of questions, with the understanding that they may not have complete answers for all questions. Since this study relies heavily on the perceptions and memories of the participants, finding different perspectives on each question was a necessary form of triangulation to complete a fuller picture of campus dynamics. The number of interviews necessary to gain a complete picture of the presidential arc at each institution varied depending on the responses given and the circumstances of the institution. The number of interviews and additional data consulted were driven by the circumstances of the case, not an artificial desire for any arbitrary equivalency between cases.

Financial and enrollment data over time and presidencies, IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System), accreditation information, admissions materials, strategic plans, and institutional histories were all used as determined by the circumstances and interview data in each case and are cited in the text where appropriate.

Interview Questions

The initial set of questions for each interview was provided to participants in advance. All interviewees were asked all questions, with follow–up questions asked as appropriate in the semi–structured interview format. These questions, as noted previously, were developed during the earlier interview study and tested in the pilot:

- Please trace the history of the presidency at your institution as you recall or understand it.
- As you reflect back over the individual presidencies at your institution, which do you consider more successful than others? What made them so?
- How do you think that financial health and enrollment trends at your institution intersected or trended with individual presidencies?
- Were there difficult presidential transitions in your institution's past? What made them so?
- What environmental or external factors impacted the level of success of individual presidencies?
- How did the role of the presidency change over time on your campus, either between presidencies or over the course of an individual president's service?

Controlling for Possible Threats to Validity

Theory triangulation was performed throughout the gathering of interview data, by checking responses and perceptions between interviewees (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009). As information was received from one respondent about past trends and events, it was specifically incorporated into the follow–up questions asked of subsequent interviewees. Data triangulation also occurred when possible by confirming interviewees' recall of enrollment trends, financial information, and other empirically available information with campus data sources (Yin, 2009).

There was a real possibility for bias in this study because interviewees suggested other interviewees, and there may have been an impulse to choose those who might corroborate their point of view. There was some purposeful sampling in the distribution of roles among the proposed interviewees in order to counteract this phenomenon. Although the specific roles of interviewees varied between institutions, a balance of faculty, administrators, and (where possible) trustees was sought. Concerns of bias were shared with the interviewees when they were asked for their suggestions and they were asked to make their recommendations with that perspective in mind. This was also another point of potential data triangulation as the interview data emerged; if all the interviewees seemed to be offering the same perspective, it would have been necessary to actively seek others. However, with a few exceptions, responses and perceptions of different interviewees were divergent enough that this concern did not emerge.

Ethical Considerations

Interviewees were promised confidentiality and given the opportunity to decide whether their direct quotes could be attributed to them by name. Since some interviewees did not wish quotes to be directly attributed to them, and the names of the case institutions were not to be revealed, all interviewees have been protected by a pseudonym reflecting their role at their institution. The interviewees will in many cases know of others from their institution who participated in this study, but individual responses were not shared with other interviewees in any identifiable manner.

One individual in the pilot study declined to be interviewed because she believed that the memories of past presidencies and campus controversies would prove painful for her. This

was a consideration in interviews for this study, in many of which the participants described painful past events or discussed individuals with whom they had concerns and disagreements. At no time, however, did any participant decline to answer a specific question or ask to stop the interview.

Positioning of the Researcher

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) offer two metaphors for the interviewer role: the miner, or data collector, and the traveler, or data constructor. Conceiving the interviewer as traveler "leads to interviewing and analysis as intertwined phases of knowledge construction, with an emphasis on the narrative to be told to an audience" (p. 49). This is my role in this study: to construct a series of stories from the experience of those who live and work and care for these institutions. Telling these stories has required careful and respectful interpretation, not just the recital of biographical or historical facts. In the narrative stories that follow, I have been assiduous in challenging my own assumptions and triangulating as much as possible within and across cases. Doing so proved an essential exercise in the vitally interested detachment required of a researcher.

Chapter IV: The Case Studies

Choice of Cases

The potential universe of cases for this study was limited to small, private institutions in the Northeast. Suggestions were elicited from individuals with association and accreditation experience in New England for institutions with presidential arcs that might be interesting or useful to examine.

However, when I contacted the schools recommended by the correspondents, access became a significant problem. The current presidents of five different institutions either refused from the outset to participate in this research, or agreed to do so and then upon further reflection declined. At least one was advised not to participate by a trustee he consulted; another agreed and then subsequently declined immediately before numerous reports in his local press of financial, enrollment, and personnel difficulties at his institution.

Personal connections led to the three institutions willing to participate in this study, all of which are noted in the individual cases. In each case, my connection was either at least ten years prior or fleeting, and interviewees included people I had not met and to whom I had no connection. My background knowledge of these institutions proved helpful in understanding their history and the flow of their presidential arc.

Methodology

Prospective interviewees were given a brief synopsis of the study and the pre–determined interview questions in advance. Each was promised confidentiality, both in their identity and in their responses to the questions, although they may have revealed their

participation to each other. (There is no reason to believe that any of them discussed their responses prior to their interview.) Additional information was provided both by the institutions in the forms of histories, strategic plans, and other internal documents, and obtained through publicly available information like IPEDS.

The number and role of interviewees varied between the cases according to institutional circumstances, but in each case the sitting president both consented to be interviewed and to provide access to trustees and/or former presidents. Interviewees were given the operational definition of presidential failure cited earlier, to frame their conceptions of the success or failure of individual presidencies at their institution:

A failed college or university presidency is one that ends before the president or the institution anticipated, under circumstances perceived by the president or other key stakeholders to be less than optimal.

The three cases are presented here in reverse order of complexity, beginning with the most straightforward presidential arc to the most complex studied, as the touchpoints of each arc build on each other in drawing conclusions from this research. The format used is both linear–analytic and chronological in the individual cases, within a theory–building structure in which issues and events in earlier cases are directly compared to those that follow (Yin, 2009).

The Cases

Case 1: Practical College. I have never worked at Practical College, but I did apply for their presidency when the incumbent was selected, a fact I made clear to my interviewees. I was part of a group of seven semifinalists chosen for telephone interviews, out of the initial pool of

approximately 55 applicants, but I was not chosen to be one of the three finalists who visited the campus. Two of my interviewees for this case study were part of the search committee who interviewed me; both remembered me. However, there was no indication they altered their responses in any way, as I assured them both, truthfully, that I respected the choice they had made in the current president, who is far more experienced than I in the qualities the committee sought. I did a fair amount of research for the presidential interview, and so was very familiar with the culture and history of the institution, which helped in the interviews for this study.

Interview sources. I conducted telephone interviews with six individuals familiar with Practical's presidential arc and history: the current president and two former presidents; one current and one former member of the board of trustees, both of whom had chaired recent presidential searches for the school; the current dean of the faculty; and an original faculty member who had previously served as academic dean and director of curriculum. Quotes and information from the three presidents are noted as follows: current president (President E); immediate past president (President D); former president (President C).

Practical's presidential arc. Practical College, in a very rural corner of Vermont, was founded in 1958 as a boy's boarding school that a board member interviewed termed as "attractive to the sons of very rich people who were having trouble" (Current Trustee). Practical has always emphasized experiential learning, outdoor pursuits, and the environment, integrated with the liberal arts.

Practical offers few majors, and its curriculum is highly integrated, with offerings in ecology, environmental humanities, sustainable agriculture, and outdoor leadership, although students can also self–design a major within those broad areas of study. Students are required to complete at least one internship, generally in the sophomore year, and to perform weekly work on campus. First year students engage in a two week intensive experience called *A Sense of Place* to acclimate them to their living and learning environment, essential as all studies at the school are so tied to the environment and the outdoors. Students also engage in a four day Winter Expedition at the end of the fall semester, and most faculty and many staff participate as well. At Practical, "outdoor adventure [is seen as] a metaphor for learning–trust, responsibility, facing new consequences" all provide opportunities for reflective, experiential learning (Faculty). Standardized tests are not required for admission, and "visiting students" from other institutions are encouraged to spend a year at Practical in something akin to a field placement or study abroad experience. Admission is not selective; around 90% of those who apply are admitted, with emphasis placed more on an applicant's essay, work and outdoor experience, and reasons for choosing Practical, than on grades and other more traditional academic measures of success.

Practical is one of the smallest colleges in the country, with fewer than 200 students enrolled, although the new president wants to expand to 300 students in the next few years. More than 60% of their current students are Pell–eligible (Faculty), and almost all receive some form of institutional aid, which keeps net tuition revenue relatively low—another of the president's concerns. There are only nine full–time faculty, and there is no tenure, rank, or

academic departments or other traditional structure; "faculty are full participants and have the capacity to change and respond to and develop things without a whole lot of institutional inertia" (Faculty). They are not well–paid compared to other institutions; in 2012 the average faculty salary was $30,140. The current president inherited a $1.5 million "structural deficit" and was chosen in part for his fundraising successes at another institution. He has focused on both fundraising and friend–raising almost exclusively in his first year in office in an effort to retire that deficit and to grow Practical's endowment, reported to IPEDS in 2012 as $838,263.

Its small size, focused curriculum, and unity of purpose and work lead to a very communal culture at Practical, characterized by the current president as "a level of personal authenticity among students, faculty and staff . . . they live out the values of the mission in their personal lives. [It's a] great unifying factor in the way the college is led and administered." However, that same cultural and academic unity means that few students are drawn to Practical, and that exacerbates enrollment and financial concerns. Retention and graduation rates at the institution are also a concern; both hover around 55%. Financial concerns, changes of academic interest, and lack of sustained fit with Practical's culture and ethos all contribute to those numbers.

Practical is "an extremely busy place . . . very outdoorsy, very experientially oriented . . . [with a] very unusual culture for a college" (President D). Its status as one of only seven colleges in the nation to participate in the federal Work College program is a defining aspect of its institutional character and provides a level of necessary cooperation and joint effort among students, faculty, and administration. A long–time faculty member noted that "institutionally,

we're people who do things and love to teach . . . direct work with students is what matters most" (Faculty). The emphasis on outdoor experience, work, and experiential education, however, delayed the formation of quality offerings in the liberal arts and precluded the development of a more traditional academic culture, both of which are salient factors in Practical's presidential arc and its long-term viability. Practical's extremely small size is a source of pride to many in the community—"the place is proud of its leanness"—and has created a "culture and strong expectation of poverty" (President D) in which students and faculty do without the facilities and resources available at other institutions. This culture contributes to a low retention rate, delayed maintenance and decaying infrastructure, and a limited curriculum.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Practical began to move from a secondary boarding school into higher education, first with a one year degree completion program, followed by associate's degrees, and then, in 1998, bachelor's degrees. One founding president (President A), served for 10 years as Practical moved into higher education, and when he left to return to graduate school the institution began to founder (Faculty).

The 1980s and early 1990s were a time of great instability for Practical, with a series of short–term presidents who left little lasting impact on the institution. The transition from boarding school to associate's degree–granting college was a rocky one exacerbated by the lack of a long–term leader with a single vision (President C). Cultural fit was an issue; President C's immediate predecessor had come from a community college and struggled to find a place at Practical. A board member had to assume an interim presidency before the search that found

President C. Another previous president had even filed a wrongful termination suit against the institution.

The result of all the presidential turnover during this period was a perpetual "survival" or "panic" mode (Faculty) that never allowed the institution to move forward or to build new programs or initiatives. Keeping the doors open and recruiting a minimum number of students to conduct classes and pay the bills proved difficult enough, and there was no real opportunity to build an advancement program or relationships with donors that would bring in much–needed capital (Faculty). When he joined the governing board around 1995, the former trustee characterized Practical as "a quintessential Yankee institution . . . [and] a very shaky ship— . . . [with] really wholesome people—never a personal, angsty place."

The faculty largely kept Practical going during these turbulent years; the unity of purpose and commitment inherent in Practical's culture, even stronger in its earlier years, gave them a resilience and determination to move forward in spite of poor leadership: "the institution survived because the faculty worked together . . . it [the College] would have failed, it would have closed, were it not for the faculty and their willingness to work and sacrifice together . . . we basically built a firewall between the president and the students" (Faculty). The former trustee described an ethos at Practical that "is highly participative, very flat hierarchically, short on rhetoric . . . no nastiness."

The Board of Trustees was perceived as a large contributing factor in this unstable and damaging period, failing to choose presidents wisely and to build mutually supportive relationships with the presidents they hired. The faculty member noted:

> The Board was not philosophically in sync with what we were doing as faculty member, we did not have resources, it was very difficult to raise money . . . in the early days because we [the institution] looked so different . . . the Board was a self–replacing board and they were not effective at finding people who understood the mission of the institution.

The institution's fortunes began to improve with the appointment of President C in 1996, when Practical offered only associate's programs. A proponent of "leadership by walking around," (President D), President C came to the position from a major national outdoor leadership organization, not from another higher education institution. His presidency is viewed as the institutional turning point by all the interviewees, and the point at which Practical moved from trade institution accreditation through NEASC to a fully accredited baccalaureate institution. President C noted that this was not much of an option for Practical, since the school's classification within NEASC was as a "career and technical" institution, a category which by 1996 had ceased to exist. He was also motivated by the trend in the 1990s of junior colleges closing or merging with other institutions, and felt that moving to four year programs was Practical's only means of long–term survival. The faculty also wanted to build academic programs more integrated with the liberal arts instead of "specialist" technical programs, and wanted to recruit fewer students "and stop sending their good students elsewhere" (Faculty) when they transferred at the end of their two years at Practical.

Very fortunately for Practical, President C also brought big donors with him, including a few members of his own family (President D). President C's wife even served as the development director during the early years of President C's tenure, and in his words "really tuned up the fundraising" with a goal of raising all the institutional aid given the students. (At

that point, students came to Practical with less financial aid; 10–15% of them paid full tuition. More than half of the current students are Pell–eligible, and few do not receive at least some financial aid). Practical got a few large grants in President C's early years that helped start fundraising momentum, and he also led Practical's first major campaign as a higher education institution. The former trustee, who ran the search when President C was hired, called him Practical's "first modern successful president" and specifically cited his work increasing enrollment and balancing the budget.

President C was also able to strengthen the Board of Trustees and to begin to create a more professional board with a national perspective. His prior reputation in the field of outdoor education gave him many contacts with a core community for Practical's mission and outlook, and he was able to pull in board members that broadened Practical's perspective in ways that still supported its core mission. The strengthened Board was in turn able to stabilize the place, recruit longer–term presidents in the future, and keep the institution focused on its core missions: "one of [President C's] great contributions has been in strengthening the Board and in getting a board who understands who we are…presidents now come in understanding what the institution is and wanting to enhance that, not come in to 'fix' the place and do all kinds of different things," as was the case with some of the short–term presidents (Faculty).

The move to four year programs was not without its detractors, and even ten years later President D would hear from disaffected members of the community that "we had been doing great and now it's crisis all the time" to create and develop curriculum, raise the funds to support a four year infrastructure, and provide a wider variety of learning opportunities.

However, baccalaureate programs changed the culture of the institution, leading to a stronger commitment from students and greater engagement with the community as well as additions to the curriculum. President C noted that fundraising became easier as well.

The curriculum expanded a good deal with four year programs, since all two–year students studied resource management. The emphasis of the curriculum was ecology and outdoor pursuits, with a few new majors in those areas as well as an option for a self–designed major. President C viewed this as a success: “the curriculum got beefed up quite a bit . . . in the initial years, the big hurdle was the senior research project—that did a few kids in, but for the most part, they got through it.” Practical’s emphasis on integrating the liberal arts with environmental stewardship was emphasized during this transition; President C and the faculty believed that Practical was “not an ag school” (President C) and the liberal arts foundations would distinguish their curriculum.

The unity of the curriculum, organized as it was (and is) around the themes of the environment, the outdoors, and experiential learning, was a point of pride to President C and a positive aspect of the institutional culture that he saw mirrored in its faculty, who had a spirit of “everybody pulling together, no departments, no silos.” He strove to exemplify this ethos himself, and noted (unsurprisingly, given his background) that a Practical president would need a strong connection to the outdoors and should be prepared to go on the annual Winter Expedition and participate in other campus activities.

When President D took office, in 2006, Practical had offered successful baccalaureate programs for several years, and at least on the surface, was far more financially stable than in

the past. The financial successes, however, proved to be illusory: President D discovered that even though his predecessor had balanced the annual budgets, a $350,000 structural deficit existed. He was immediately concerned that "the place was paper–thin" in buildings and infrastructure because "everything had been cheaped down on" to keep moving and invest in the four year programs (President D).

If President C became known in retrospect as the "finance president" or the "four–year president," President D positioned himself almost from the beginning of his tenure as the "curriculum president." Concerned about the 25% attrition rate he found for Practical's seniors, he immediately began to examine the curriculum and discovered what he termed "significant and dangerous problems . . . there wasn't really a four–year curriculum and it was faculty–oriented and not student–oriented . . . the requirements were onerous." Although not a traditional academic (he came to Practical from a long stint in fundraising at another New England progressive institution), he focused on the curriculum, with a particular emphasis on integrating the liberal arts with the experiential emphasis that was, and is, Practical's hallmark. He also promoted new baccalaureate models, publishing nationally on the topic, and moved Practical to a year–round institution in which it is now possible for students to complete a bachelor's degree in a little more than three years if they attend during summer sessions. This innovation, however, exacerbated enrollment concerns, which President E has made one of his first foci.

These efforts were not universally appreciated, and a current trustee states that "[President D] didn't have the best relationship with the faculty . . . and he wasn't absolutely

successful in the fundraising and the admissions, because he tried to spend his time changing the curriculum." The same individual, however, notes that curricular changes championed by President D, such as a reduction in the core curriculum including outdoor education, proved a boon to admissions by increasing the appeal of Practical to transfer students. President E agreed with this assessment, commenting that while President D made

> pretty radical changes to the curriculum that the faculty did not appreciate in content or process . . . [dismantling] core, experiential, challenge–based, outward– bound portions of the curriculum to develop more self–designed and modernized curriculum . . . the curricular changes were critical to survival in the modern world.

Although President C was not the first president of Practical, he was the first in its present, baccalaureate status, and the transition from him to President D was described in some ways as "the transition from the founder to the sustainer—that difficult organizational kind of issue" by the long–time faculty member who described himself as "one of the first holdouts from the founder types." President D, particularly in his early years, tried hard to make Practical a more traditionally–structured institution and operated more formally than the community was used to: "he made a lot of decisions within the president's office—there was a more formal institution structure . . . new faculty did not come with the same level of commitment to the same ideals" (Faculty). During President C's tenure, there had been the need for a number of self–studies for NEASC and other accrediting bodies, so Practical enjoyed an unusual unity of purpose and understanding: "we always knew who we were, what we did, and why we did it!" (Faculty). Newer faculty came from more conventional academic backgrounds in which allegiances to departments and disciplines play a much larger role, and this differentiation was in some ways encouraged by a Board of Trustees with an interest in helping the institution

transition to what they perceived as a more conventional, and therefore sustainable, model: "the Board of Trustees hated it when we operated as a committee of the whole and thought people should aspire to move up" (Faculty).

Curricular development was not particularly what President D had been hired to do; the Board had been "looking for a fundraiser and an admissions expert . . . those were the two eliminating factors" (Current Trustee). The trustees realized that Practical needed to move to a more sustainable financial model and lacked a fundraising framework to bring in much–needed capital, although they also appreciated the need for a stronger academic focus as the institution evolved: "the Board was heavily loaded with mountain climbers ten years ago . . . [we are] driving now much more toward an academic focus" (Current Trustee).

President E took office in 2012 and it is far too early for any of the interviewees to determine the level of success of his presidency, but the early signs seem positive across the board. The faculty member described President E's arrival: "he hit the ground running . . . and brought some good people with him . . . he improved aesthetics on campus and online and enhanced public visibility . . . but he has to face growing financial aid needs and deferred maintenance—our charming New England campus has charming New England problems!" President E was hired for success in fundraising and admissions in a revival of a progressive institution in the Midwest, but the current trustee, who chaired the search, notes that the Board and search committee were also looking for someone who could provide administrative leadership. He agreed with the faculty member's assessment that President E has created a

strong administrative structure and improved the "curb appeal" of the campus to make it more appealing to prospective students.

The shift to a more "professional" way of operating—better fundraising, fiscal management, and recruiting infrastructures—culminated in a new strategic plan during President E's first year in office. The plan's goals call for Practical to retain its emphasis on experiential learning while reforming its curriculum and academic policies to ensure that students can graduate on time and have meaningful experiences. Practical's emphases on outdoor leadership and environmental stewardship are stressed, alongside a call for the institution to increase its enrollment, renovate its buildings, and increase its financial resources. President E, while proud of the community's accomplishment in creating the plan, noted the elements in Practical's culture that made doing so a challenge:

> [Practical] can be mystifying if you're used to hierarchy and structure—no rank, no departments . . . it makes it hard to create things like a strategic plan. You have to make a personal appeal for everything—can't assign it to department chairs or the like, or could you shift that apolitical culture quickly if you're not careful—which can sacrifice efficiency and forward progress.

Practical had its highest enrollment ever in the fall of 2013, which both President E and the faculty member cited as a huge boost to campus morale. Slowly, within its own context and culture, Practical is embracing the changes of the wider environment and moving toward what it believes will be a more financially and environmentally sustainable future.

Table 4.1

Touchpoints in Practical's Presidential Arc

PRESIDENT	DATES OF SERVICE	PARTICIPATORY AND EFFECTIVE SEARCH PROCESS?	SUCCESS BY DEFINITION GIVEN	SUCCESS IN JUDGMENT OF INTERVIEWEES	MAJOR FACTORS IN PRESIDENCY
A	c. 1976–1986	No—carried over from boy's school	Yes	Yes	Move from secondary to post–secondary
B–ASSORTED	c. 1986–1996	Not always	No	No	Instability, lack of effective relationships with the governing board, lack of financial resources
C	1996–2006	Yes	Yes	Yes	Start of better relationship with Board, more fundraising, move to baccalaureate degrees
D	2006–2012	Yes	Yes	Yes	Revisions to curriculum, enhanced attention to fundraising and student recruitment
E	2012–Present	Participatory, but internally run			

Evolution of board's role. As we will see with Northern College in the second case, Practical's board "grew up" with its presidency, evolving from a very local board with little understanding of their stewardship responsibilities into a more professional, collaborative, national board with a stronger understanding of the presidential role. The long–time faculty member cited four characteristics that he felt contributed to the successes of Presidents C and D and the promise of President E's early presidency:

- Each had a good relationship with the Board of Trustees;
- Each brought new people to and strengthened the perspective and role of the Board;
- Each had contacts in the outside world that could support Practical financially or by strengthening one of the core elements of its mission;

- Each believed in, and in some way, lived, Practical's mission.

Presidents C and D played large roles in this evolution with the board, as both reached wider to recruit to the Board those with more experience in higher education and the ability to give and attract significant financial resources. It was during President C's tenure that the Board "healed their relationship with the presidency and moved from a project to a college" (President E). The current board is national in scope and combines experts in Practical's curricular areas with those with deep ties to its corner of Vermont. All three of the most recent presidential searches were done after a significant community–wide needs assessment to choose the next presidential with the skill set necessary for Practical's challenges at that point in time. In each case (the hiring of Presidents C, D, and E), the board was able to articulate goals and priorities for the new president, and all three presidents report that they received the necessary support from the board to achieve those goals—thus contributing to their success.

This characteristic of Practical's presidential arc, at least in recent times—the ability to reflect as a community and make careful searches for the individual best suited for the challenges at hand—is key to the successes of its later presidents. It also helped Practical's faculty to weather the changes at the institution over the last two decades and retain enthusiasm and a strong sense of community: "faculties don't like change and each of these presidents has brought in change, one way or the other, but they have accepted it and changed . . . because they have always been included in the process" (Current Trustee).

Culture of work, poverty, and unity. For the Practical faculty and staff, the work is the thing, and not the ideology behind it, which, we will see, has contributed to a far more

successful recent presidential arc than that at Dewey College in the third case. The current president describes his institution as "deeply apolitical . . . [faculty and staff] tend to be attracted to the concept of the College as a means to live the way they want conscientiously." At the same time, Practical's expectations of itself, and the level of affiliation with the outside world, are low, exacerbated by their physical isolation in rural Vermont. Their "culture of poverty is a real and significant part of the institution," (President E), and they take pride in doing their work with meager physical and financial resources.

This means that, until recently, presidents have not had the fundraising expectations common to other institutions. Significant fundraising only began in the late 1990s, with President C, and even then was seen more as a survival tactic—to keep the doors open and compensate for prior poor financial management then to expand physical plant or erect named buildings. The most salient factor in all interviews when describing presidential success was cultural fit, not ability to attract big donors to the institution. Practical's approach to fundraising has changed in recent years, and the Board made expectations in this area very clear to Presidents D and E upon hire. There is much deferred maintenance, and general awareness of the need to renovate and expand physical facilities and to expand enrollment (although the new strategic plan calls for the very modest enrollment goal of 120 total students).

Practical endures, despite its fiscal challenges, because of the unity of purpose and values in its culture. This is clear, uniformly, to all interviewees, and it is credited with Practical's ability to withstand the years of "revolving door" presidents before President C arrived in 1996. It means that fiscal and enrollment crises are tackled as a community, without the vituperation

that sometimes causes presidencies elsewhere to founder. And the focus on a common purpose—and most of all on the work to be done of guiding students, preserving the environment, and tending the campus—allows the community to transcend disagreements such as those with President D's curricular innovations and just keep working.

Willingness to choose non–traditional presidents. Neither President C nor President D, both of whom were viewed as successful presidents, had terminal degrees. The former trustee, who ran both searches while on the board, described the board's and search committee's reasoning behind these choices:

> [Practical has] chosen servant leaders more often than not, not necessarily with doctorates—craftspeople or outdoor people, in tune with the mission who appeal to the soul of the community instead of just another academic leader . . . [we] went from a more conventional PhD model to really looking at the heart and soul of the place…it worked well.

President C's success came from the fact that he was the right person at a crossroads at a very small institution; he was "a president with vision, who can make connections, who can find people who want to invest in this mission—it's much easier to be able to transform this institution (Faculty). He did not come from higher education but from outdoor education, and his relative lack of higher education experience or a terminal degree was seen as largely secondary to his connections, his fundraising, and his capacity to embrace the mission and ethos of the place—in short, in the Practical tradition, to do things that were useful within the community. President D is remarkably candid when asked about the success of his own presidency and the nature of the office, noting that:

> Some Board of Trustees members would say that I “saved” Practical…but when a place is so small and fragile that can be like a baseball “save” in that it happens regularly . . . If you keep one of these small places open and strengthen it a little, and you’re not a criminal, then you’ve succeeded!

All the interviewees stressed the very different personalities and foci of Presidents C, D, and E, but note the skills each brought to Practical at crucial junctures in the institution’s evolution. In such a small community, “relationships depend on the personalities of the president” (Current Trustee) and are crucial to the success of the presidency and therefore of the institution. The current trustee believes that Presidents C and D were

> successful in the things they set out to do at that time—and they all built on each other—which is why [President E] can be successful now . . . A successful tenure really builds on what was there before . . . but makes those changes that can move the institution forward, with the students and the faculty behind those new directions. That’s a great skill, and not everybody has it.

Case 2: Northern College. The second case, Northern College, was expanded from the pilot study. I began my career in higher education at Northern College and served as its Director of Student Activities from 1989–1995. I served under two of its presidents, the first considered quite successful and the second a resounding failure. I have watched the College’s progress from a distance over the years. It has been 19 years since I left Northern, giving me the necessary distance and objectivity to undertake a successful case study, but my familiarity with the institution was helpful in grasping its history and culture.

Interview sources. I conducted telephone interviews with four individuals familiar with the arc and history of the presidency at Northern: the current president, who has been in office since 2004 and served as Northern’s provost from 2000–2004; the former Dean of Student Affairs from 1985–1995, who served with three of Northern’s presidents; the director of library

services, who has worked in various administrative positions and taught at the institution since 1976; and a member of the faculty, who taught English at Northern from 1973–2012.

Northern's presidential arc. Northern was founded shortly in 1946 on the former lakeside site of one of the historic Adirondack resorts. The son of the resort's founder left the land, existing buildings, and the remainder of the family's estate toward the founding of a college that would teach hospitality–and forestry–related subjects, a nod to the sources of the family's fortune and the institution's location in the Adirondacks.

From the outset, experiential education was a hallmark of Northern's academic programs, and forestry and hospitality students, then and now, are required to do internships and field placements as part of their programs. The forestry holdings of the College provided a laboratory for hands–on study, as did the College's former ownership of a nearby hotel and affiliations with others. Programs in ecology and business were added later to complement the original offerings.

For most of its history, Northern offered only associate's degrees, but added baccalaureate programs in some areas in the late 1990s. In 2011, approximately one–third of Northern's graduating class received associate's degrees; the rest earned a bachelor's. Their fall 2011 enrollment was 1063, almost all full–time, residential students.

Northern is extremely isolated; the nearest town of any size (about 5,400 residents) is 12 miles away. However, its location in the Adirondacks gives students access to many outdoor sporting venues, and there are some cultural offerings in nearby Lake Placid. The College is on the shore of a lake and students have access to canoes, skis, and other seasonal sporting

equipment. Its natural setting is beautiful but proves both a draw, for students interested in outdoor pursuits, and a challenge, for students who find the isolation and the winter climate daunting. Retention has long been an issue of concern for Northern. In 2011 IPEDS data, the institution reported a retention rate of 62% for first–time students and an overall graduation rate of only 45%.

The College has reported surpluses for the past several years but is heavily tuition–dependent, with approximately 65% of its revenue coming from tuition. Fundraising has been a large emphasis over the past decade, with major capital gifts from a former governing board member to build a new library and a new student center. The campus has been physically transformed by these gifts, along with a new residence hall and another residence extensively renovated. The endowment stood at $18,556,660 in the fall of 2011. There are approximately 200 faculty and staff employed by Northern, and their salaries do not tend to be high; the average salary for a full professor is $56,556; for all faculty it is $46,846.

The bequest of land and money to start Northern was in 1937, but World War II intervened and prevented the establishment of the institution until 1946. The first few presidents (under various titles) were administrators of the estate, and it was not until 1948 that the founding president took the reins.

President A (all presidents will be referred to by letter to protect the identity of the institution and the respondents) acted as “pretty much a one–man operation” (Faculty), with no faculty or institutional governance. He made all decisions regarding students in the absence of a real student affairs operation, and did so on a very personal and sometimes arbitrary basis.

There was an academic dean, who served as "really a go–fer for the president" (Faculty) and the three academic division heads really ran the institution, since there was no functioning administration for much of President A's tenure. The Faculty respondent notes that in the early years, the institution "was focused by academic prerogatives" and lacked much financial acumen or long–range planning.

President A held a doctorate in science and had taught physics before his presidency, but his pre–Northern career had been mostly in local businesses, some of them associated with the founding family. The board of trustees at that time was very local and comprised of other small–town businessmen like the president, who picked all candidates for the board and ran the institution like a "personal fiefdom" (Faculty). This highly personal, one–man style of leadership was, of course, far less unusual at small private institutions in the 1940s and 1950s. Faculties rightly insisted on academic freedom, but our modern models of shared governance were not yet completely in evidence. And the school, as noted before, is extremely isolated; influences from the outside world and other academic institutions were few and far between in a pre–digital age. Northern's courses of study were very narrow and confined to the hospitality and forestry fields, with some arts and sciences mixed in to give students a broader perspective and justify an associate's degree instead of a certificate. The instructors were pulled directly from those fields—they were forest technicians, surveyors, hotel managers, and chefs, interested more in training new professionals in their fields than in building a modern higher education institution. And those early years were phenomenal years of growth for Northern. The enrollment boomed, buildings were constructed, and the campus began to take shape.

However, both higher education and the rest of the world were undergoing sea changes in the 1960s and 1970s, and there came a time when President A's dictatorial approach to running his institution were no longer appropriate or tolerated. He had little time for fundraising nor building relationships outside of the narrow circle of the Adirondack Park. Both the Faculty and the Director told a story of a major food company's offer, brokered by the culinary faculty, to build a much–needed culinary and hospitality building on campus in the early 1970s. The offer would have been the largest donation to Northern to that date, and the corporation requested that the building be named for them. President A flatly refused the money, saying that no one would tell him what "his" buildings should be called. At that point, even Northern's still highly parochial board could see that changes needed to be made. In the words of both the Faculty respondent (who had just arrived at Northern at the time) and the Director (who arrived shortly after), the board "pushed out" President A and named the academic dean the acting president for about two years, as the search process "dragged on."

In what "in hindsight was regarded as an inside job," (Director) although that was less apparent at the time, the chair of the search committee named President B around 1976. He was a member of the board of trustees and a former chair of the New York Chamber of Commerce who came from the local area. He had no academic experience (Director) and held only a bachelor's degree in speech, which the gradually professionalizing faculty found somewhat problematic. According to the Faculty interviewee, the search process had by then been severely compromised and President B received his appointment from a very powerful and wealthy trustee while the two were travelling on the board member's private plane. In the view

of both interviewees, there was little consultation with the college community and little attempt by the governing board to choose a professional, well–qualified president. The board was at that time still largely local, with a smattering of summer residents with contacts and experience beyond the rural community, and they chose one of their own.

However, the 1970s and early 1980s were a good time to be in the forestry and hospitality businesses, and enrollment was booming despite the fact that President A had never built an efficient admissions and recruiting strategy. In addition, Northern is quite close to Lake Placid, which hosted the 1980 Winter Olympics, a huge boon to the entire region. Enrollment stood at 1,200 around the time of the Olympics, a high for Northern, but then began to drop precipitously as interest in the Adirondacks faded (Director). Then and now, Northern is highly tuition–dependent, and President B had failed to appropriately manage staffing and strategy in the admissions office, with the result that inquiries were going unanswered and even the most basic application processing was neglected (Director).

The catalyst for President B's removal came in 1981, when he attempted to sell a parcel of land a few miles from the main campus to New York State for use as a prison camp. The camp had been used by Northern forestry students but was no longer needed after new Olympics housing had been built, so President B saw an opportunity for a cash infusion to offset enrollment decline. The Rockefeller drug laws in New York State had increased the need for minimum security incarceration options in New York, and the rural isolation of the Adirondacks was seen as an opportune location. The publicity resulting from this decision was a disaster both on and off campus, as members of the Northern community, prospective students and their

parents, and the surrounding hamlets felt it a poor idea to bring convicts in such close proximity to the college. A member of the board went to President B in his residence one evening and asked him to resign (Faculty). A minimum security prison work camp was established on the site, and there was never a problem with the men who lived and worked there—no escapes, no untoward incidents that affected the college or the local community. In fact, work crews from the camp performed various construction and grounds work on Northern's campus well into the 1990s, providing a very cheap source of labor for the school and enabling the prisoners to gain valuable work skills. The money from the sale bolstered the very small Northern endowment. In hindsight, selling the site to the State was probably a benefit to both sides, but President B's unilateral action and failure to gain buy–in and support from his constituencies proved his undoing.

In the fall of 1982 an interim president was appointed who was known to an influential board member through his work as president of a Pennsylvania college. Although President C had experience in the role—a first for Northern—the board seems not to have gained much insight into appropriate ways to search for a new president. A formal search process was begun and then suspended (Director), and President C's appointment was made permanent. The former Dean, who was hired by and worked directly for the president, noted that "he worked an extraordinary number of hours and really put his heart and soul into" Northern, but other recollections differ. The Director found him a "very divisive figure" who appointed a number of "cronies" who were perceived by the rest of the campus as incompetent or dishonest. Enrollment trends exacerbated the situation; much damage had been done to Northern's

recruiting operations through President B's neglect, and in the 1980s "outdoorsy" programs like forestry were contracting as student interests shifted. Enrollment dropped, which put more pressure on the president and the institution's finances.

At the same time, the faculty was growing restive. There were still no governance structures in place, nor any formal evaluation and promotion processes for faculty (Faculty). President C refused to work with faculty to establish one, nor would he permit functional administrative processes to be established, insisting on a level of personal control reminiscent of President A at a time when that was no longer appropriate or tolerated. Since all decisions had to be made or approved by the president, he became known around campus as "the black hole" and the campus adopted a "silence is consent policy" within academic and administrative silos that did not allow for comprehensive planning, governance, or management (Director).

In frustration at their lack of progress in establishing formal governance and evaluation under President C, a group of faculty (including the Faculty interviewee) formed the "State of the College Committee" in 1984. They tried to meet with President C but he refused, so they voted no confidence in the president in October 1984, covered widely in regional media to the detriment of the institution (Faculty). When the Committee met with trustees, hoping to gain support for reform on campus, they replied in writing, saying (in the Faculty respondent's terms) "leave if you don't like it." With no institutional route left to address their grievances, a group of 10 or so faculty, chaired by the Faculty respondent, met with the New York State Union of Teachers (NYSUT) to form a union organizing committee. Then as now, faculty unions were

uncommon at private institutions, and an adversarial relationship deepened between the faculty activists and President C.

What followed made the matter worse, and both the Faculty and Director interviewees were able to describe events in great detail more than 25 years later. Northern had acquired a hotel property in the town 12 miles away from campus and built a residence hall there, so that students in the hospitality majors could spend a semester gaining work experience as part of their curriculum. Students worked directly with the hotel staff, who were not considered faculty until Northern's administration made them so in a direct effort "to dilute the union push" after approximately 75% of the existing faculty had signed union cards (Faculty). Since some faculty had also been laid off due to declining enrollment, it worked. The "professional" hotel faculty did not support the union, and the vote to unionize failed by either 2 votes (Faculty) or 1 vote (Director), in either case a frustrating margin for all concerned.

But the whole episode scared the board of trustees, and proved a watershed moment in Northern's history. For the first time, its faculty had acted as a united, professional body to demand a role in the institution's governance. A consultant was engaged and a group of six faculty, including the Director, worked with him to create a functional governance system like those in use at many small colleges by the mid–1980s. A faculty handbook was written for the first time, standing committees were established, multiyear contracts were instituted for long–serving faculty (Northern has never had a tenure system), and a Faculty Council was created, comprised of committee chairs. President C continued to resist this process, but in the view of the Faculty interviewee, who had led the union effort, it "might have been better than a narrow

victory on the union vote and a lot of head–knocking." The establishment of faculty governance also led to a re–examination of the president's role. No longer could Northern support an autocratic nor inexperienced leader, nor one not chosen and supported through representative processes. The board could see that more clearly than at any time in Northern's history to that date. When the Middle States Commission on Higher Education placed Northern on probation for its shaky finances (the Faculty interviewee thought that some governance problems had been recognized by the MSCHE team as well), it was time for President C to leave. Recollections differ on this; the Dean knew he had been fired by the Board and felt the situation was unjust; the Director remembered that he resigned, while the Faculty claimed that representatives of the board of trustees had to actually enter the administration building and take away his keys.

In 1988 the board finally did an open search and hired President D, described by the Director interviewee as "for my money, the best president in the history of [Northern] College," an assessment with which the Dean agreed, and by the Faculty as someone who "knew both sides of the street" in faculty and union matters, since he had previously served as a dean at a nearby state university. All interviewees noted that President D paid a good deal of attention to social and affective matters at an institution that had been demoralized by the events of the previous decade. One "could be open and honest" (Director) with President D and "you could debate and disagree and it would be OK afterwards" (Faculty). Difficult decisions still needed to be made, and Northern was in dire financial straits at the time. Soon after President D arrived on campus, he was told by the finance officer that the college could not meet its payroll. The president, using local contacts, put his own property up for collateral on a line of credit that

enabled the institution to stay open (Faculty, Dean). He made a highly controversial hire one year into his tenure, bringing to campus a "turnaround" admissions dean known for "rescuing" small private institutions in dire need of increased enrollment. This worked, but at a cost: enrollment improved, but many felt that student quality dropped, (Faculty, Dean) and the dean alienated much of the campus until the president fired him two years later. However, by then enrollment was healthy enough to hire a more conventional dean of admissions, and important steps had been taken to establish a modern, functional recruitment system—an absolute necessity for Northern or any other small private institution.

President D valued people and made no bones about it. He was "open about working hard not to lay people off" when finances were tight (Director), and he worked closely with the Faculty to continue the important work that had been started on governance, negotiating a faculty pay scale that was tied to enrollment (Faculty). He was affable, placed an emphasis on social events on campus, and was often found in one of the local watering holes enjoying a beer with any faculty and staff who wished to join him. Finding someone who would build relationships and be a more visible campus presence was a deliberate choice in the search process for President D; President C was a teetotaler and not at all outgoing, which hampered his ability to build relationships on campus (Dean). This underscores the importance of a good fit between a president and the culture of the institution and the environment, which for Northern, in its isolation, is especially salient. The culture of the Adirondacks is casual and "very laid–back . . . there is an Adirondack history of helping each other to battle the economy and the

weather, which brings people together . . . that culture snuck in and soaked in to the College" (Dean).

President D's greatest contributions were arguably in board management and fundraising. He "managed the board and no one ever had before—they were way too involved in the day–to–day stuff" (Director). He was "not threatened by disagreement" (Faculty) and encouraged different points of view and problem–solving within the board. He also made a concerted and very important effort to expand the board beyond their local, parochial scope and to reach out to local politicians and other leaders in a way that not been possible before. He had extensive Republican connections from his previous job and brought onto the board a long–serving state senator, which resulted in New York State legislative member item bills for the college's support. For the first time, there was a realization that the board needed to support the institution financially, and Northern needed board members able to do so. The Adirondacks attracts many wealthy summer residents, very few of whom had been involved with Northern before. Once the senator was on the board, the summer people followed. Once the summer people were the board, the money followed, both from them and through their connections. For the first time, Northern's dependence on tuition revenue began to (very gradually) lessen, and President D's board recruits and friend–raising led to some major capital projects after his tenure.

President D made two other lasting and pivotal contributions to the institution. Northern still held many acres of land from the original legacy. Although the forestry students used the woods as a laboratory in the same manner that the hospitality students used the Northern–

owned hotel, leading to Northern's strong reputation for experiential education, complicated land use laws in the Adirondacks made it difficult to use the land for commercial or other private purposes. President D engineered some "strategic land sales" (Faculty) to New York State, allowing those acres to remain "forever wild" forest preserve under the terms of the state constitution. This infusion of cash further seeded the small endowment and helped improve the college's financial position. The second contribution, in 1992, was to open an exploratory process to create four year programs at Northern for the first time. Both the Faculty and the Director respondents were part of this process, which was fiercely opposed by the academic dean and much of the administration, but a group of faculty had gathered data about the declining market for associate's degrees, especially at private institutions. They pitched the president at the local watering hole (Faculty) and he agreed to let the process proceed. The current President, however, notes that President D delayed the move longer than faculty memories reflect and was not, for the most part, an academically oriented president, although "in retrospect he had a sound and wonderful relationship with the faculty" (President). Today about two–thirds of Northern's students are in four year programs, and it could be argued that without that move the college would have been hard–pressed to survive (President, Faculty, Director).

President D was also the first president to leave the institution on his own terms, deciding to depart "at the top of his game and go enjoy himself" (Faculty). The announcement in the fall of 1993 that he would retire at the end of the academic year came as a shock to the entire community, since things at Northern were going well (and since no one then at Northern

had seen a president leave voluntarily!) While the Faculty respondent describes him as the best "total package of presidential leadership we've had . . . town/gown, fundraising, politics—it's all there," the current president views him as "moderately successful" and "strongly supported by a very vocal contingency of faculty who felt he had their interests at heart." (The current president was at a nearby university and a research institute during these years, and knew of President D and his work from a distance, although he was not yet affiliated with Northern.) What the Faculty and Director interviewees viewed as a healthy increase in fundraising expectations for the trustees, the President considers inadequate; he believes that President D had a "comfortable" relationship with his board because his expectations of them were actually fairly low. The fact that there is a twenty year gap between their tenures can account for some of this disparity, of course, since the role of governing boards has evolved over time. It can also be argued that the current president is able to hold his board to a higher level of fundraising responsibility because President D started the process in what was then a radical departure from the institution's history. The land sales also seem different to the current president as he reflects back. He believes the cash infusion was necessary "but came at the price of divesting us of our heritage, our land," and wishes that past presidents had found other ways to balance budgets. The current president may view President D with both a more objective and a more defensive eye. Memories are long at Northern, and grievances can be nursed over time. Those who have served there for decades have strong emotional attachments to the place (even when we moved along many years ago!) and President D's tenure was a time of progress and relative prosperity for those who remember it. They speak of it often, and unfavorably contrast the

current president's relative lack of attention to social and affective pursuits—a comparison in which he suffers, and knows it.

President E was an "unmitigated disaster" (Director), "vindictive and peculiar," (Dean) and an "abject failure" (President), and the Faculty interviewee even notes that "I don't know if he was psychotic or not." The current president faults the board for this disaster. He was a faculty member at a nearby university who knew President E and had been contacted by a member of the search committee for his opinion. He claims that he told the search committee about President E's unbalanced management style and past problems and "predicted his downfall," and that the board that appointed President E "was very poorly led and poorly informed . . . [negative but accurate] information was readily available and they did it anyway." Both the Faculty and Director interviewees participated in the search (the Director was on the search committee) and insist that the process was legitimate and thorough, but that colleagues at his institution spoke highly of him and "put up a wall of lies" (Director) to get rid of him. Afterwards, the same individuals were contrite and apologized to their Northern contacts, but it was "like the dam broke—thank God we got rid of that idiot!" (Director).

President E served as Northern's accreditation liaison officer for MSCHE, and the institution was up for reaccreditation during his tenure. With that process stalled, and grievances mounting across campus, a group of senior faculty and staff (including the Director) reached out to the board to discuss their concerns. They held a late–night, surreptitious meeting in a trustee's home that ran well over time. To the group's surprise, other board members began to arrive for a previously scheduled meeting of their own. (Director) The president

resigned the next day at the board's request, and was rumored to have been paid a year's salary to abandon his contract (Faculty). After his departure, a year's worth of unanswered correspondence from MSCHE was found in one of his desk drawers, forcing Northern to request an extension on their process.

Since the previous president had been forced to leave suddenly and in October, the board then appointed an interim. President F came to the institution with experience at another New York State private institution with experience in moving from two–to four–year programs, which was necessary to move that process forward. According to the current president, President F was told by the board to cut expenses drastically in response to yet another dip in enrollment and President E's lackadaisical fundraising. He did so, and the current president commented that "if you asked the faculty they would say he [President F] was the Antichrist", but from hindsight and with the documentation available, he was extremely successful in the painful but necessary work the board had asked him to do. Neither the Faculty nor the Director described President F in such strong terms, merely noting that "people rebelled because he was a real autocrat" (Director) who wanted the permanent position but did not get it, serving a little less than a year. The current president believes that the tight timeline given to President F was the real issue. It might have been possible to make the necessary "draconian" (President) budget cuts and difficult decisions without alienating the campus community, but the board wanted it done too quickly to accomplish that. The resulting turmoil would have made it difficult for President F to success in the permanent position.

President G arrived after what the current president described as an "extensive search that struggled a bit," and soon after he hired the current president as provost. The board by now had transformed beyond recognition and understood the importance of setting down parameters and specific charges for their presidents and then hiring those candidates best equipped to meet the institution's needs as the board perceived them. The role of higher education presidents was changing before and during this period (1997–2004), and President G's external focus mirrors those changes. The fact that this was his charge from the board also reflects that fact that this was no longer a "comfortable local board," (President), but one with a more sophisticated understanding of the president's role and the needs of the institution (President). It's unclear, however, how well the board's perceptions were shared with the faculty and rest of the campus community. The board charged President G with rebuilding and repairing community and external relationships, and he was "not an academic," leaving that arena firmly to the current president (President). He seems well suited for that role; the Director referred to him as "the empty suit" and good with donors and community outreach, rather than a "day–to–day guy." According to the Faculty interviewee, President G was "kind of a Southern gentleman" who cut back on administration and spent most of his time externally focused. He did not seem to form many attachments to the institution or those on campus and had more of an "itinerant CEO mentality." He led a successful capital campaign, and several of the largest donations in the institution's history came to Northern during his tenure, which allowed a physical transformation of the campus. A beautiful new library and learning commons was built through the generosity of a board member, followed by a new, lakeside student center. It's

worth noting that while President G gained these donations, both the Director and the Faculty saw them as growing from “the seeds planted by [President D]” (Director). After four years, President G made an amicable departure after “the cold finally got to his wife and he went to the dark side,” (President) moving to lead a for–profit educational institution in the South.

The other noteworthy element of President G’s tenure is that it was smooth, unmarred by controversy and the rough transitions like those experienced by his immediate two predecessors, when Northern “went from incompetency to the Antichrist in the eyes of the community” (President) and which left overwhelmingly bitter memories in the minds of those who experienced them (like the special assistant who refused to be interviewed because she did not want to relive painful memories). President G gave Northern “a sigh of relief” (President).

The current president (now President H) served in an interim capacity for about six months before accepting the permanent appointment after what was perhaps “the least representative search committee of all the “real” searches (Director). The campus community perceived the process as almost a “foregone conclusion” (Director) and one in which “the fix was in” (Faculty). The Faculty interviewee views this as an expression of an increasingly “corporate culture” within the board. Even the current president notes that he was appointed after a national search, but the board “did it on their own, which is flawed,” and that when the time comes to search for his successor he will recommend that they use an outside firm to consult. His charge from the board is to invest heavily in academic strength and the make sure that the four year programs thrive. His contract includes very specific fundraising targets, both in dollars and in time spent, which he believes was not the case with past presidents. This

directive and quantifiable approach from the board to their new president could be a reflection of a more corporate or businesslike approach, as could the president's penchant for outsourcing as many campus services as possible (Director). However, it could also reflect a trend across higher education to streamline operations, engage in assessment and institutional effectiveness initiatives, and to rise to a higher level of accountability.

Some long–standing faculty and staff at Northern—people like the Faculty and the Director—have mixed feelings about a transition to a more distant, businesslike president: "[Presidents G and H] represent a turnaround in that they were not actively destructive of resources and programs as earlier presidents were, but morale has never been lower because people no longer feel they are part of what is going on—the social fabric of the institution has virtually disappeared" (Director). They both perceive a marked lack of enthusiasm, not just on campus but among the board members who had led the great fundraising efforts of the early 2000s, and caution that involving the campus community and paying attention to interpersonal skills and relationship building is more important than President H and the board realize.

Northern continues to struggle. Yet another enrollment downturn in 2007–2008, coupled with the recession, caused President H to go to the faculty and ask them to agree to salary cuts until things turned around. The faculty did agree, and President H notes the contrast between the collaborative approach he was able to take because he had the time to do so, and President F's inability to do so, which so negatively impacted his presidency. However, Northern's current enrollment is relatively stable and the institution is on a more even keel than it has enjoyed in the past. President F confidently expects to serve for at least "a few" more years, and no drastic

changes in curriculum or capital projects are anticipated. While some in the community may still reflect wistfully on past presidencies in which they felt more engaged and enthused, the college's work continues on a stable, even keel.

Table 4.2

Touchpoints in Northern's Presidential Arc

PRESIDENT	DATES OF SERVICE	PARTICIPATORY AND EFFECTIVE SEARCH PROCESS?	SUCCESS BY DEFINITION GIVEN	SUCCESS IN JUDGMENT OF INTERVIEWEES	MAJOR FACTORS IN PRESIDENCY
A	1946–c. 1974	No	No	Yes	Growth of institution, lack of governance and administrative processes
B	c. 1976–1982	No	No	No	Declining enrollment, controversial land
C	1982– c.1988	No	No	No	Resistance to faculty governance, financial and enrollment difficulties, accreditation
D	1988–1994	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strategic land sales, growth in fundraising, board development, process to move to four year programs
E	1994–1996	Yes	No	No	Financial and enrollment declines, campus turmoil, accreditation problems
F	1996–1997	No	No	No	Severe financial problems
G	1997–2004	Yes	Yes	Yes	Strong fundraising, lack of controversy, conversion to four year programs
H	2004– present	No	Unclear	No	Strengthening of four year programs, decrease in campus morale

Importance of the search process. A Northern president's success in office mirrored his search process. With the exception of President E, an unqualified disaster who came to the office following a thorough and professional search, and President H, who is still in office and whose level of success cannot yet be ascertained, each president appointed after an open and participatory search has been judged a success, and those who were not were deemed failures.

There are two possible explanations for this. Presidents who come into office without the benefit of participation from the campus community may not have the necessary level of cooperation and support from their stakeholders. Since a presidency is a collective construct and not just the efforts of the incumbent, it is essential that those who will make a presidency successful be given the opportunity to do so from the very beginning. Additionally, a thorough needs assessment is an important element in any presidential search, something that Northern's board seems to have grown to appreciate along its history. In order for a president to be successful, the board and the community need to reach some level of consensus on what the campus needs and what set of presidential skills will be most likely to meet those needs. When President D was appointed, the institution needed the local connections and political savvy he brought to the table, to obtain state funding, expand the board, and negotiate land sales with the state. In the late 1990s, and after two short and turbulent tenures, the board determined that the new president (G) would need to focus externally and mend relationships, and searched for someone able to do that. These presidents were successful because they met the institution's needs at those times; the institution was successful because they took care to determine those needs in advance.

Enrollment and finance. Enrollment is Northern's overwhelming institutional concern, since the institution is so tuition–driven. A difference of even a few students is enough to cause budget turmoil. Enrollment trends were a negative determinant of success for Presidents B and C; in both cases, they had not effectively managed the admissions operation, and their presidencies suffered as a result. For later presidents, fundraising success and (for President D)

land sales could mitigate minor fluctuations in enrollment, but the more successful presidents all watched the admissions operations very carefully. President D took the strong step of bringing in a very polarizing “turnaround” admissions dean to get the job done. It worked, and the college stabilized financially as a result. President H has made enrollment a priority throughout his tenure as provost and then president, even bringing in a national consulting firm to assist.

Financial matters have also proved to be a large factor in the success or failure of individual presidents. None of the interviewees talked much about funding new initiatives, except for the large capital projects (new library and student center) of the early 2000s. At Northern, finances are a matter of survival, and the manner in which presidents handle the school’s perpetual fiscal crises greatly influences the trajectory of their tenure. President E neglected the college’s finances, which impacted the board’s decision to remove him from office, and left a dire financial crisis to his successor. Since President F had to make drastic budget cuts and other cost–saving measures within an emergency timeframe that did not give him the opportunity to consult and work closely with constituencies, he had no time to build the social capital so necessary for a successful presidency. It is unclear whether he would have been a viable candidate for the permanent position had he come into office under better circumstances. On the other hand, President D secured credit for the institution through his own contacts and using his own property as collateral, assuming a rather extraordinary amount of personal risk. His actions allowed the college to stabilize, and further land sales built the

endowment and kept the place in operation. His presidency was judged a success because he handled financial challenges so deftly.

Board/president growth and symbiosis*.* As was the case with Practical College, Northern's board grew and developed in a symbiotic loop with the presidential role. The early boards were largely local and not terribly professionalized, and the presidents they hired had little chance of success. Presidents A, B, C, and F were all chosen through personal connections with board members who seemed to lack the vision and understanding of the role necessary for stronger appointments. All four were failures by the definition given earlier, and three of the four were deemed failures by the interviewees. (It is worth noting here that this may be a shortcoming of my working definition for presidential success and failure. President A grew the institution for almost thirty years and established it as a going concern. He started with very little in the way of facilities, students, and faculty, and kept the place open. His management style and failure to keep pace with the outside world led the trustees to force him out earlier than he had planned, and his unhappy departure therefore makes his presidency a failure by the terms of the definition. However, from the interviewees' perspective and by the standards of growth and survival, his was a success).

After President D began to develop the board's role into more fundraising and governance capacities and expand its membership to those with a greater breadth of experience, however, the presidency was strengthened. Better boards lead to better presidencies, which lead in turn to better boards, and "the key to the arc of the presidency is how the president is constrained or supported by his trustees" (President). The current

president spent a good deal of his interview referencing the board—a sign, perhaps, of his close working relationship with them. (He shared that he makes about 10–15 trustee calls a week, and he has 20 board members.) He traced this board's evolution from a "comfortable local board . . . through the lake [summer] people deep pocket phase . . . to the industry model with the board has to have a strong contingent of industry leaders to match the academic programs." One could mirror the evolution of the president's role along the same lines. Presidents A and B were local and well known to the board. President D had many local connections and started the push to bring more "deep pockets" into Northern's orbit. Presidents G and H were chosen for specific skill sets. The current and immediate past presidencies have been "very much constrained or very much enhanced by the way the board interacts with the president and by the way it gives its charges to the president," and this trend is likely to continue. It would be most helpful to Northern if both the board and President H are mindful of this and intentionally develop their roles and relationships with Northern's long–term interests in mind.

Correctly reading the environment. The successful presidents in Northern's history correctly anticipated and managed changes in the external environment; the less successful ones did not. President B, for instance, failed to anticipate both the post–Olympic slump in the Adirondacks and the changing curricular trends of the early 1980s. Enrollment declined precipitously as a result, and his presidency was short–lived. President D did an excellent job of aligning himself and the institution with those of political influence in the North Country, and was therefore able to sell land under the most advantageous terms for Northern. Presidents D and G also recognized the need to expand the institution's offerings to bachelor's degrees, as

originally proposed by faculty that included both the Faculty and Director interviewees. This was perhaps the single greatest factor in Northern's continued survival, since so many other private two year schools have closed.

Case 3: Dewey College. I earned my master's degree in education from Dewey College in 1996 in a low–residency program, and two years later came to campus to serve as its Dean of Students. I worked there for two years, primarily with students in the residential undergraduate program (since closed), and lived on campus during that time. I worked for only one of Dewey's presidents, and although I left the College in 2000, have kept a close watch on its progress. One of its other former presidents served as a mentor faculty for me in my earlier doctoral work. However, I had only a passing acquaintance with more than half of those interviewed.

Interview sources. I interviewed eight individuals associated with Dewey: Presidents D, F, G, and H; a former chair of the Board of Trustees and alumni; two long–time faculty members (Faculty Members A and B); and a former Dean of Students/Registrar. Dewey also had the most published histories, press accounts, and archival material of any of the three case institutions, all of which was readily made available to me by an associate director of advancement and alumni affairs, who was a student at Dewey when I served as the Dean of Students there in the late 1990s.

Dewey's presidential arc. Dewey College is an alternative and progressive institution in central Vermont. The College grew out of a Universalist seminary founded in 1863, and identifies so strongly with those roots that it recently celebrated its 150th anniversary, marking 1863 as its founding date instead of 1938, when the College charter was granted. Their current

enrollment is roughly 750 students, of whom more than 500 are enrolled in graduate programs. All students are enrolled in low–residency programs and attend residencies in either Vermont or Washington State.

No one is sure exactly how to answer the question of how many presidents Dewey College has had, and the institution is famous for its contentious campus culture, with trustees, faculty and staff, and a succession of presidents frequently at odds. Presidents at Dewey have a history of departing suddenly, often at the invitation of the governing board after a series of campus controversies. There are many difficult transitions in Dewey's past in which interim presidents took over for a short period of time; indeed, Dewey's last permanent president left in December 2013, to be replaced by a board member serving as interim for four months, followed by a former CFO in another interim role. For the purposes of this study, therefore, only "permanent" (not interim) presidents with at least a two–year tenure will be examined and given letter names Presidents A–H, with a twelve–year period of at least five interim and other presidents (1969–1981) listed as Presidents B.

Dewey had a classic founding president, (President A) who made a careful study of educational principles in response to the rise of Fascism in Europe during the 1930s and made democratic governance a bedrock principle of the new institution. He was "a charismatic leader with a very specific vision" (President F). The new college was meant to be an educational experiment, and incorporated many then–radical principles, according to the College history prepared for the 150th anniversary:

> [Dewey was noted for] use of discussion as the basic method in classroom teaching; its emphasis on the whole lives of students in determining personal curricula; its incorporation of practical work into the life of every student; and its development of the college as a self–governing learning community in which everyone had a voice. In its quest to get to the root of education [Dewey] also did away with the grading system, written examinations, required courses, honor rolls, and diplomas.

Life–long learning and experimentation were also among Dewey's founding principles. Dewey was also the first institution in the country to offer low residency and degree–completion programs for working adults, beginning in 1963. Indeed, many of Dewey's innovations and experiments would be adopted by other educational institutions, who adapted them for their own programs without Dewey's emphasis on social justice and democratic governance.

From its founding, Dewey was steeped in the progressive education theories of John Dewey. The College's practical philosophy of progressive education was spelled out by a long–serving faculty member and College historian in 1989:

> Transactional, transformative, reconstructive, consequential education seems basic to persons who—as the [Dewey] Mission states—will "learn, think, and act with intelligence and responsibility in such a way that they will be increasingly active in improving the physical, social, cultural, political, economic, and spiritual conditions of persons everywhere, and in restoring and creating a life–enhancing environment.

An education at Dewey was to be experiential, student–driven, and consequential to the learner's interests and place in the world. Faculty members were not to teach, as that term was understood elsewhere, but to help create situations—discussions, experiences, challenges—that would allow and encourage the student to learn what s/he needed to know. And such learning

was to be steeped in a desire to change the world for the better, to work for social justice, to create a better world. In the words of the same faculty member:

> [Dewey] furnishes a time and a place for inquiry. The major thing [Dewey] aims to teach(aims to help you learn) is how to carry out the inquiry: about yourself, the world, and yourself in the world. Only through learning how to learn and helping others learn how to learn—how to clarify needs and the problems they generate; how to use books and experiments and dialogue and experience to deal effectively, cooperatively, and responsibly with those needs and problems; how to draw informed conclusions from the experiments and convert the conclusions into responsible social action—only through such learning is humankind likely to survive.

President A was deeply ideological in his approach at Dewey and, like Northern's President A, built the College from the ground up through the force of his beliefs and his ability to convince others to also believe in Dewey's potential. His name is revered on campus to this day, and subsequent presidents speak about him and his beliefs as a perpetual force in the institution's subsequent history. "It's like Marx—you can't talk about [Dewey] without [President A] . . . [he was] phenomenally successful, and then, depending on who's giving the assessment, ranges from the scurrilous to the benign despot" (President G). Faculty A also described him as a "revered benign dictator."

President A's single more enduring legacy to Dewey's troubled presidential arc was his emphasis and insistence on democratic governance, in which everyone—administrators, faculty, and students—would share a voice in everything from curriculum to finances, and the institution would be governed through a traditional Vermont Town Hall meeting format. People who were drawn to Dewey after that "expected more openness, shared decision–making, voice" (Faculty A)—often more than subsequent presidents and board members felt was necessary to

give them. This fundamental tension still lies at the core of Dewey's culture and engendered a fair amount of bitterness in most of the interviewees.

The perpetual tensions of President A's legacy of democratic governance and the tasks of managing a modern educational institution are often mentioned in overtly political, even socialist terms. President G noted that "the dialectic of [Dewey] is always a dynamic that needs to be managed. You can't identify with one faction and succeed . . . usually the problem [for presidents] is over–identification with the Board, which sets off the anarchist element." The presidential role is in a constant state of flux and balance as a result:

> [There is a] blurring of appropriate boundaries—we don't differentiate roles very well. We expect students to design their learning because those are our values and practices, [and] this has leaked over inappropriately into the running of the corporation . . . In some cases it's a naïve misunderstanding of different roles within the community . . . [The community is] not good at seeing the big picture and seeing the difference between the learning environment and the business side of the organization—the rules have to be different because there are business and external imperatives that must be met. (Faculty A)

President D concurred with this assessment, citing a "deeply troubled institutional culture with dysfunctional norms and role, exacerbated by chronic lack of resources."

At the same time, Dewey lacks the collective focus and sense of purpose that unites the Practical College community. There is a "high value placed on individual needs and interests—not just students, but everybody" (Dean). The influence the institution once exerted throughout higher education with its early experiments in adult, low–residency, and learner–centered education is largely in the past, as what was bold when Dewey first did it becomes commonplace elsewhere. The former trustee notes that "it's a culture of confusion and a culture of the past. It's a culture of an ego that believes it is something that it probably isn't." President

H sees this element in the culture in two ways: “the focus on individuals rather than the institution here has been a serious strength as well as a weakness of the College.”

Dewey’s experimental, student–driven approach resonated well with the culture of the 1960s and 1970s, and in 1973 the College had its peak enrollment, with around 1,900 students across all its programs. However, as other institutions adopted degree programs for adults, and as the culture shifted to more career–oriented programs by the 1980s, enrollment began to drop (much as it did at Northern College during the same period). The New England Association of Schools and Colleges put Dewey on warning in 1980 over concerns about its finances, and the College was forced to sell several of its programs to a nearby college and to reorganize its administration and close a campus to remain open.

A succession of five interim and “permanent” presidents (Presidents B) from 1969–1981, following President A’s retirement, exacerbated this environment–driven decline. Beyond the difficulties of following a founding president with the charisma and bedrock beliefs of President A, outsiders had substantial difficulties understanding the ethos and complicated internal politics of Dewey (Faculty A).

This pattern continued with Presidents C and D, although each remained in office for at least four years and made lasting changes. The tension between the faculty’s belief in democratic governance, and fluctuations between weakness and reactiveness on the part of the board made for a toxic mix in which presidents were squeezed in the middle. Instead of uniting the community in a candid assessment of Dewey’s strengths, future directions, and needs in a

leader, the board and faculty viewed each other with continued suspicion and doubt. A former trustee and a current faculty member illustrate these perpetual tensions:

> The only thing that became constant was the faculty . . . the presidency was continually undermined. The faculty would undermine anything a president did, and there were very weak boards, and eventually the board would remove the president—but not through clear planning or evaluation processes or any sense of where the place was going. The institution kept on throwing presidents away. (Trustee)

> [There are] significant differences and tensions embodied in what is understood about the administration of the College. Student and faculty relationships tend to be strong, supple and pure and the shared values are commonly understood and embraced, but this is a source of ongoing tension with the administration. (Faculty B)

By this time the Board of Trustees had seen enough. The institution was foundering and they perceived the endless debates about governance and the invective directed against a series of presidents as the product of a dysfunctional faculty and campus community. The board believed "the faculty was the problem and had too much control . . . and they were shifting to a more managerial/corporate focus before the rest of the institution would follow" (Dean). They installed a new president with a military/Catholic school background and an autocratic approach, with a mandate to remove those he felt were impeding Dewey's progress. The two year result ended up in the local press and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: protests, demonstrations, the sudden elimination of sixteen faculty and staff positions in the name of financial exigency, more protests and demonstrations, the re–hiring of several of those individuals, the hiring of several expensive consultants, and the abrupt removal of yet another president by the board (Dean, President F).

President F noted this history of “personal and institutional catastrophes” upon hire:

> Presidents would be brought in and either try to put forth a vision—and it wasn’t the right one—because if you weren’t the founder you couldn’t really do that. The Board of Trustees would bring in people to manage the enterprise but [Dewey] needed more than making it work. Leaders needed to work in ways that were consistent with its values.

The questions of institutional fit that were so salient at both Practical and Northern took on an additional resonance at Dewey, where the founding principles and the lack of a defined and agreed–upon role for its presidents made it so difficult for presidents to operate as they might elsewhere.

A turning point for Dewey came with the closing of the residential campus program in 2002, leaving only low–residency programs. The campus program’s closing “laid the groundwork for a renaissance at [Dewey]” (President D) and reframed the financial structure of the institution. The program had long been troubled and had difficulty attracting enough students to make it financially and academically feasible:

> The campus program did not have the educational leadership it needed, nor did it have a consistent and strong circle of students who were ready for the freedom and autonomy that was implicit in that educational model, so the culture of the campus program was degraded and that led to tension. It was a necessary decision to close. (Faculty B)

The end of the campus program also removed from Dewey a number of faculty and staff who had been sharp critics of a succession of presidents, and some of the strongest advocates for the democratic governance principles they saw as fundamental to the institution. Even those who supported the closing of the program for financial and academic reasons question whether the removal of these individuals—for whom there were no longer jobs—was a motive in the program’s closing (Faculty A, President G, Trustee). Regardless, the program’s closing provided a

fresh opportunity to expand the more economically sustainable low–residency programs and provided the Dewey presidency with "an inflection point to move to the next stage" (Trustee). President G assumed office immediately after the program closed and, in his own words, "created a sense of possibility and worked strategically with the different constituencies in ways that were deeply rooted to the mission." Online education was on the rise elsewhere, and the market was ripe for low–residency education in ways that had not been the case in the past. The institution was able to stabilize its finances and enrollment for the seven years that President G was in office, and tensions eased. A second campus in Washington State was acquired in partnership with other organizations, and that gave Dewey the opportunity to expand in ways that it could not in Vermont.

The struggle for survival has left Dewey without a deep history of long–range or strategic planning and with challenges in fundraising and alumni relations. President H entered office in 2010 seeking to "move [Dewey] from start–up to sustainability." She and the community created a new strategic plan that called for increasing enrollment, building more revenue, and—significantly—developing internal infrastructures and governance that would allow effective decisions and plans to be made. Her list of goals during her interview neatly encompasses all of the challenges and dysfunctions in evidence throughout Dewey's presidential arc:

> Facing outward and building a community of stakeholders that connect external to internal; claim a more public voice about education; proactive and long–term planning practices; connect vision and operation; move from an oral culture to a written culture and a culture of assessment instead of random experimentation; develop respectful communication patterns; [create] clear processes and decision–making and roles and authority; address anti–authority culture by

> instituting dispersed leadership patterns; [and practice] leadership from a place of abundance and generosity rather than fear and scarcity.

And then she resigned. In July 2013, less than two months after articulating the list of goals above, she told the trustees she would leave Dewey at the end of the year, citing family issues as her only reason. They tried to negotiate an extension of her deadline, but she declined. She had some of the same clashes with faculty and the board that other Dewey presidents had experienced, and all of the same financial challenges, and the same concerns about a culture of disrespect and contention, but her resignation came as a great surprise to all. A board member stepped in for a few months, until a former chief financial officer could be brought in to serve in an interim capacity.

Everyone at Dewey seems to agree on two things: the institution has a rich tradition and a continuing role to play in higher education; and the “unproductive and wasteful” conflict (Faculty A) that has been so much a part of the institutional culture needs to end. It remains to be seen whether the next president can lead the community to achieve both.

Table 4.3

Touchpoints in Dewey's Presidential Arc

PRESIDENT	DATES OF SERVICE	PARTICIPATORY AND EFFECTIVE SEARCH PROCESS?	SUCCESS BY DEFINITION GIVEN	SUCCESS IN JUDGMENT OF INTERVIEWEES	MAJOR FACTORS IN PRESIDENCY
A	1938–1969	No	Yes	Yes	Establishment of powerful ideology of participatory and democratic governance, educational experimentation, creation of low–residency programs for working adults, creation of higher education institutions
B	1969–1981	Varied	No	No	Turmoil over leadership, many short–term presidents
C	1981–1990	Yes	No	Yes	Turmoil over leadership, contraction of campus programs, sale of some programs to nearby
D	1990–1994	Yes	No	Qualified yes	Turmoil over leadership, attempts to define governance structure, continuing educational experimentation, growing concern of trustees over governance disputes and role of campus faculty
E	1994–1996	No	No	No	Turmoil over leadership, elimination of faculty and staff positions, re–hiring of same positions, campus protests
F	1997–2001	Yes	Yes	No	Turmoil over leadership, continued concerns about viability of campus program, first attempts to build external partnerships, move by faculty to unionize, campus protests
G	2003–2010	Yes	Yes	Yes	Closing of campus program, establishment of West Coast campus, emphasis on expanding low–residency programs
H	2010–2013	Disputed	No	Unknown	Turmoil over leadership, establishment of strategic plan, move by staff to unionize, abrupt resignation of president

Governance and the establishment of appropriate roles. For all its discussions on governance and the appropriate roles of the president and other campus constituencies, no real, long–term resolution has been reached, and it must be if Dewey is to survive. The Board of Trustees and the faculty, so often at odds and so often the victims of mutual suspicion and misunderstanding, must reach a permanent equilibrium of co–existence if presidents are not to be perpetually in the crossfire between the two.

More than at many other institutions with more stable governance structures, the role of the president at Dewey changes with each incumbent, not least because institutional traditions and role definitions are so permeable. This does not have to be a bad thing:

> Presidents should better understand that they have this kind of leeway; they don't take healthy advantage of it. If they had the right skills—organizational, interpersonal—it could be a great opportunity . . . [A president] needs a bigger game plan than putting fires out . . . [Dewey's] presidency could be the most rewarding or the most challenging and frustrating out there and you need a very thick skin, a cohesive vision and the skills to bring people into it. (Faculty A)

The entire campus must be engaged in this process and must abide by its collective decisions. Conflict for the sake of debate or in service of founding principles, without regard to whether it moves the institution forward, has retarded Dewey's progress for decades. Some on campus question how much of the community is truly engaged in the ongoing conflicts and whether they are the product of a remaining few:

> [Dewey is] not a community, it's a collection of communities . . . [there is] lots of difference in terms of expectations and practice as far as discourse. Some "neighborhoods" are more professional, some more provocative and anything goes. There is a shared expectation for risk and experimentation, but more rawness and carelessness in some groups . . . [There is] shouting down, intimidation, running out of town by a small but very vocal minority for whom [Dewey] is a much more central part of their lives, but the silent majority just wants to do their job. (Faculty A)

> It's important to define what's at stake in this particular presidency at this particular time? . . . you're looking at the collective pattern in the individual stories over time, and the deep structure. (President F)

President H's abrupt resignation, shortly after enumerating the ambitious set of goals previously cited, may have been at least in part a response to these challenges. She spoke several times during the interview of the need to enhance respectful discourse and move toward a more assessment–and accountability–driven model of conducting business at Dewey. In doing so, however, she expressed equal concern about the role of the trustees and that of the faculty and cited the "unhealthy relationship between the Board and leadership, faculty and leadership, staff and leadership . . . people here don't look to leadership to lead, they look to leadership for approval." She was actively seeking "culture–changers" in all three groups when she announced her resignation. The next president will still have to find them.

Importance of the search process. Several of the search processes that brought new presidents to Dewey were questioned by others in the community, either as outright appointments by the Board of Trustees without appropriate campus input (President E), or as decisions made within the context of a search process to serve individual agendas (President H). It would be impossible to tell whether all of these allegations are true, or whether they are manifestations of the lack of trust within Dewey's culture.

Perhaps even more than at Practical and Northern, a participatory and open search process is essential for any president at Dewey to enter office with a semblance of legitimacy. Dewey was founded on principles of participatory decision–making, and it remains a highly personal culture, where relationships matter a good deal and where no one feels too

constrained about speaking out and expressing contrary opinions. The climate of suspicion and mistrust that has long existed between the faculty and the trustees, and that greets new presidents as they arrive, has only been exacerbated when the community feels excluded from the crucial process of choosing new leadership. The presidency at Dewey is not a role that is automatically invested with the trust and deference that presidents at other institutions may enjoy as a matter of course; it must be earned continually by each incumbent. Search processes that were both appropriate and open—and, perhaps more crucially, widely perceived that way—were essential through this presidential arc.

Putting ideology into constructive action. At its best, Dewey's philosophy of education was both groundbreaking and transformational in ways that should resonate in today's world:

> [Dewey] was founded on a cultural value of a kind of civic morality . . . today we hear calls for an engaged citizenship and how higher education can contribute to that—education that develops our ability to value people and to want to take action for the welfare of our planet—education that recognizes the importance of respect, empathy, responsibility. It isn't so much what we teach, but how we teach and why. We expect students to play an engaged role as inspired and inspiring citizens. (President F)

But Dewey has yet to find ways, as an institution, to turn that energy outward instead of channeling it into internal disputes and debates over process. At one time, during the 1960s and 1970s, Dewey was considered a leader in higher education and an experimental laboratory of sorts, pioneering programs for adult and low–residency students that were adopted by many other institutions. Now, after too many presidential turnovers and stories in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and the local press, it is more known for anger and dysfunction.

If Dewey wants to survive or even to regain its former influence, it will need to resolve more of its internal issues—issues that have plagued the institution throughout its presidential

arc. It will need to find ways to play a more public role on the issues of social justice and progressive education that are so ingrained in its institutional saga and in the hearts and minds of its students, faculty, and alumni. It will need to stop looking inward and begin to scan the environment for curricular and social themes that it can then convert into constructive contributions to the wider society.

***Embracing the wider world of 21st century education**.* And in finding ways to translate its institutional beliefs and energy into constructive action beyond its campuses, Dewey will need to increasingly engage with the outside world it often consciously shuns. Dewey can be both "self–referential and –reverential . . . folks there did not place [Dewey] in the wider context of higher education as a whole, just in terms of its influential history" (Dean). Its emphasis on its founding principles and failure to differentiate appropriate roles within its governance system meant that trends in the wider environment like enrollment declines, the rise of online learning, and greater calls for assessment and accountability from the government and accrediting agencies were not perceived and acted upon at Dewey.

As a result, throughout its presidential arc Dewey has been what President H termed a "start–up institution," without long–range plans and increasingly vulnerable to shifting financial and enrollment trends. Presidents who came to Dewey from leadership roles at other institutions—most notably Presidents E, G, and H—understood this, and tried to bring to Dewey a greater awareness of and interaction with other institutions and organizations beyond central Vermont. President G succeeded in building the partnerships that led to the establishment of the successful West Coast campus. President H managed to create a new strategic plan during

her brief tenure that calls for fresh marketing and public engagement plans. President I—whoever s/he turns out to be—will need to build on this legacy and open the gates for a freer exchange between Dewey and the world it wishes to influence.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

As discussed in Chapter I, an institution's presidential arc is a comprehensive examination of:

- Each individual presidency, or, at institutions with a history of short–term or interim presidents who left little impact on an institution, groups of presidencies;
- The level of success of each presidency, as determined by a definition shared with all correspondents or interviewees;
- The institutional culture, history, and self–defined "saga" (Clark, 1972);
- Environmental factors that significantly impact individual presidencies or the institutional history (i.e., enrollment trends, the national or regional economy and its effects on fundraising and the institution's finances, trends in curriculum, shifts in the national higher education culture, etc.)

Chapter IV told three stories of the presidential arcs at each of the three case institutions. Practical, Northern, and Dewey Colleges each had a rich story to yield, with presidential arcs that intersected with their institutional sagas and philosophies, the changing environmental circumstances in which each institution found itself, and the skills and approaches of a series of very diverse presidents. The lived experiences of the participants in those presidential arcs, as related in their interviews and documented by archival, financial and enrollment, and press material, create for us a tapestry in which individual threads, or touchpoints, emerge to yield lessons for other higher education institutions. Touchpoints, as also defined in Chapter I, are the persistent themes or significant events that influenced the

presidential arc and/or the successes and failures of individual presidencies. We study the arc and look for touchpoints because the circumstances of any individual presidency will not show us what we need to know about presidential success and failure. Higher education presidencies are complex interplays of individuals, environments, and institutional sagas, they should not be examined in isolation. It is only by analyzing the totality of the presidential arc at a given institution, and by comparing to that of other institutions, that we can identify patterns that will add to our understanding of how to help presidencies succeed.

Practical, Northern, and Dewey Colleges all have presidential arcs that yield several touchpoints for further analysis. Each institution has a definable culture, a founding story and set of values, and a distinct set of presidents whose differing characteristics intersected points in its history in ways that were decisive to its institutional path. The levels of success of each of their presidencies differed in complex ways that were determined by the institutional culture, the environmental factors at play at the time, and the skills and approach brought to the institution by each president.

Parallel Touchpoints

Most of the touchpoints in each institution's arc were recurring themes or evolutionary processes that intersected in significant ways across several, or all, of an institution's presidencies. Some touchpoints related to each institution's distinctive culture and saga; some were local manifestations of phenomena seen throughout higher education. Each institution, however, had one common, significant touchpoint event that changed its course and impacted

the success of the presidencies that followed. In those cases, the presidential arc was ruptured and the institution set forth on a very different path.

The touchpoints of each presidential arc, identified in Chapter IV, were as follows:

Table 5.1

Touchpoints of Each Presidential Arc

PRACTICAL COLLEGE	**NORTHERN COLLEGE**	**DEWEY COLLEGE**
Evolution to baccalaureate programs	Establishment of baccalaureate programs	Closing of the undergraduate campus program
Evolution of governing board role	Board/president growth and symbiosis	Governance and the establishment of appropriate roles
Culture of work, poverty, and unity	Correctly reading the environment	Putting ideology into constructive action
Willingness to choose Non–traditional presidents	Importance of the search process	Importance of the search process
	Enrollment and finance	Embracing the wider world of 21st century higher education

The first four sets of touchpoints listed on the chart paralleled each other across the three institutions. In the case of each institution, there was a significant shift in curriculum and degree level that redefined the institution, effectively rupturing the president arc as subsequent presidents found themselves leading a drastically changed institution. MacTaggart (2007) described this process as an academic turnaround, in which an institution in financial, academic, and reputational decline can take decisive steps toward reinvention. Such turnarounds have three distinct stages, all of which require specific presidential skills: restoring financial stability, marketing and branding, and academic improvement (2007, pp. 3–8). The turnaround presidents at each of these institutions (President C for Dewey, President G for Northern, and President G for Dewey) all proved to be good choices to lead turnaround institutions in terms of

the needs of their respective institutions. Institutions, and most particularly the governing boards who select presidents, must recognize when they are at a turnaround point and choose presidents who will have the necessary skills and leadership style.

Practical evolved from a high school to two–year and then to baccalaureate programs. It was only after four–year programs were established that Practical's President C could begin to raise much–needed capital, assemble a more nationally–focused board, and change the institution's profile. Northern also adopted four–year programs through a faculty–driven process, in response to a general decline in private two–year institutions nationwide. This initiative has stabilized enrollment and broadened the institution's financial base. Dewey went in the other direction, eliminating its undergraduate campus program and concentrating solely on the low–residency programs it had pioneered many years before. The campus program had long been a financial drain on the institution, as well as the locus of much of its strife and governance challenges. Closing it enabled subsequent presidents to streamline operations and explore fresh opportunities.

In each case, this rupture of the arc led to new opportunities and the elimination, at least partial, of long–standing financial and enrollment challenges. The presidents who took office in the wake of each rupture benefited from the changed dynamic. Practical's President C was able to raise far more capital to upgrade physical plant and develop new academic programs. Practical was able to recruit more and better students and to keep them longer, stabilizing their enrollment. The same was true at Northern, where President G was able to attract the largest donations in the institution's history to construct a new learning commons and student center

that revitalized the campus. Northern's enrollment also grew by about 20% during the period after baccalaureate degree programs were created. Dewey's President G, who took office after an interim president had closed the campus program with the assistance of the Board of Trustees, was the first direct beneficiary of the decision. Freed from the financial drain of the campus program and from the rancor generated by many of its faculty, who had led many previous campus protests, he was able to concentrate his full energy on strengthening and expanding the low–residency programs. Dewey entered into new partnerships with other institutions and opened a satellite campus on the West Coast, expanding its enrollment reach to those who might have found attendance at residencies in rural Vermont too much of a burden. The faculty benefited as well, as they were able to spend less time considering questions of governance and their role on campus, and more time on academic innovation and their work with students.

Broader Touchpoint Themes

Four broad themes emerge from these touchpoints, all with wider implications for the higher education presidency. Each institution has different touchpoints that contribute to each theme.

Table 5.2

Broader Touchpoint Themes

	Founding president syndrome/Evolving role of the academic presidency	Institutional saga/Insularity of small schools with distinctive cultures	Competing cultures in modern higher education	Legitimacy of the presidency and individual presidents
PRACTICAL COLLEGE	Evolution of governing board role Willingness to choose non–traditional presidents	Culture of work, poverty, and unity Willingness to choose non–traditional presidents	Culture of work, poverty, and unity	Culture of work, poverty, and unity Willingness to choose Non-traditional presidents
NORTHERN COLLEGE	Board/President growth and symbiosis	Correctly reading the environment Enrollment and finance	Correctly reading the environment	Importance of the search process Enrollment and finance
DEWEY COLLEGE	Governance and the establishment of appropriate roles	Putting ideology into constructive action Embracing the wider world of 21st century higher education	Putting ideology into constructive action Embracing the wider world of 21st century higher education	Governance and the establishment of appropriate roles Importance of the search process

Founding president syndrome/evolving role of the academic presidency. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, higher education presidents were sometimes viewed as "captains of erudition" (Veblen, 1918) who enjoyed far greater freedom to rule their institutions and make curricular innovations that endure today. These were men (almost exclusively white males) who occupied public roles as well, serving as cultural intellectuals and enjoying wide respect and recognition beyond their institutions (Dennison, 2001; Greenberg, 1998). However, more public money was invested in higher education in the latter half of the twentieth century, both to create more public institutions and through legislative initiatives like the GI Bill and

federal Pell and various state grants to enable wider access to education. With additional money came additional requirements for accountability, government regulations, and assessment. Regional accreditation agencies were created to assure the quality of institutions and to protect the public investment in them, and accreditation requirements have steadily increased over the years. The real and perceived power of the presidency eroded (Thelin, 2004); presidents could no longer do as they pleased, and instead had to please and satisfy an ever–widening array of stakeholders (Birnbaum, 1988; Padilla, 2005).

This dynamic is powerfully illustrated in the three case institutions. Northern and Dewey each had a founding president in the mold of the “giants” of the last century. In both cases, the founder (President A) built the institution from the ground up and ruled everything from building construction to curriculum. In both cases, the institutions needed to learn what to expect from subsequent presidents, and how to support and interact with presidents in a stronger tradition of shared governance. Dewey’s President A casts an especially long shadow even today, since the institution was founded on such strong principles of social action and democratic and participatory governance. The community struggles with how to define itself and how to conduct business in light of these principles to the present day, despite the fact that the world around them has changed. Practical did not have such a founding president, but as it grew from high school to two–and then four–year programs, it also needed to find a new role for its leaders.

One has to examine the entire presidential arc at these institutions, particularly Northern and Dewey, to see how this evolution of roles has impacted the level of success of

subsequent presidencies. In each case, President A was followed by a succession of short–term, unsuccessful presidencies, as the institution struggled to emerge from the shadow of the founder. The second parallel touchpoint in these three presidential arcs was governance, and particularly the relationship between the president and the governing board as both roles evolved as they did at other institutions through the late twentieth century.

Although each of the three institutions evolved in different ways, this has proved a persistent theme in presidential success and failure at each school. In the cases of Practical and Northern, the presidential and board roles evolved together in a symbiotic way. The successful presidents at each school recruited stronger board members with a better understanding of their role and more experience in higher education. Those board members in turn directed more comprehensive presidential searches after community–wide needs assessments, which led to better hires for the presidency. Although this is a simplification of a complex process that could probably be fodder for its own study, most of the Practical and Northern interviewees, including both current presidents, pointed to this dynamic as a decisive factor in the successes of presidents later in the arc. Both institutions grew from their rural surroundings and their boards were at first populated from the immediate area, with little understanding of the wider field of higher education or of their fiduciary role as trustees. Their early appointments of presidents at both schools reflected that lack of sophistication. Practical's President A had been associated with the boy's school from which Practical grew. Northern's President A was a local man with an education background but no experience of higher education administration. Both were builders who laid solid foundations for the colleges that would emerge, creating new

facilities, curriculum, and administrative structures from the ground up. They did what needed to be done in the short term to keep the doors open, and in the sense, both were successes in the judgment of the interviewees. However, both were followed by several years of leadership turmoil and quick turnover of subsequent presidents, because both they and their boards had failed to lay the groundwork for smooth leadership transitions and community–wide understandings of what it meant to move the higher education institution to the next level of success. Part of the reason, in both cases, was the failure of both presidents, and their boards, to recruit new board members from outside their immediate circle and to bring to their boards the level of educational and financial expertise needed to oversee an institution by the 1970s and 1980s.

Northern's President A was a classic founding president—a larger–than–life figure who ruled with an iron hand, built the place from the ground up and kept it going by sheer force of will and commitment. Dewey had the same kind of founder in its President A, who devoted the bulk of his working life to creating a college founded on principles of self–directed learning and democratic governance. He left a far more enduring legacy through this ideological foundation than did Northern's founder. Governance at Dewey has been, and remains, a perpetual touchpoint in its presidential arc and the focus of much energy and dispute, thanks to its founding principles of democratic governance and the inability of successive presidents, the governing board, and the faculty to determine appropriate roles for different campus constituencies. These vexed issues of governance and roles have impacted presidential success and failure throughout Dewey's history, up to the present day. A former board member referred

in his interview to "throwing presidents away" to describe the continual campus upheaval the drove a succession of leaders from office. The Board of Trustees and the faculty have yet to come to terms with each other, yet to adopt roles that are suitable for small college governance in 2014, and presidents continue to be caught in the middle. The last president left in December 2013; Dewey has its second interim in place since then. Although she cited family issues to explain her departure, she also spoke at length of the incivility inherent in Dewey's culture, born of years of mistrust and suspicion and resistance to any kind of authority. Dewey will need to undergo an effective role establishment that can be accepted by all stakeholders before it can enjoy the benefits of the symbiotic board–and–president mutual growth and support that has enabled the success of later presidents at Practical and Northern.

Institutional saga/insularity of small schools with lifestyle attractions. Clark (1972) was the first to coin the term "institutional saga" when describing the tendency of higher education institutions to create their own cultures, stories, and even mythology. Institutional sagas can include an institution's mission (Practical's strong commitment to work, outdoor education, and stewardship of the environment); legacies of its founders (the charismatic strengths of Presidents A at both Northern and Dewey, who quite literally built those institutions); and ideologies (Dewey's commitment to participatory governance and social action, a legacy from President A). Institutional self–identity is such a powerful force (Clark, 1972; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; MacDonald, 2012) that it can shape a presidential arc in powerful ways.

Schein (2010) described a process by which members of a culture—in this case, the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of a higher education institution—interact with that culture

in ways that are shaped by their own values and cultural understandings. Such is the case with the three case institutions, for which institutional culture proved to be the third parallel touchpoint. Each of the three has a very distinctive culture. Practical's strong culture of work, poverty, and campus unity has served it well, enabling the community to survive through its unstable (Presidents B) period and to rise above disputes like the disagreements over President D's curricular changes. At Northern, the prevailing culture is based on that of the Adirondacks. Students and faculty are drawn to the region, and to Northern, because of its emphasis on outdoor learning and leisure pursuits, its heritage of banding together in the face of economic and climate challenges, and a casual, no–frills atmosphere in the midst of the splendor of great camps and wealthy summer residents. In Northern's presidential arc, this touchpoint took the form of correctly reading the environment of the Adirondacks—strategically selling land, cultivating contacts with summer residents, and capitalizing on the area's natural resources in curriculum. It is a less identifiable culture than those of Practical and Dewey, but nonetheless recognizable to those who are attracted to the Adirondacks, and those presidents who read the culture well and fit into it found more success than those who did not.

Dewey's culture has been one of social action and participatory governance, the legacy of founding President A. Unlike Practical, this institutional culture has not been a unifying force—it has too often turned inward and served as a dividing wedge. Where Practical presidents benefited from their culture of work, poverty, and unity, a succession of Dewey presidents suffered because they could not successfully navigate competing expectations. McLaughlin (1996a) discusses reasons for what she terms "early exits" from a presidency, and

one of those is “rejection of alien tissue,” a fanciful term for a poor fit between a president and an institutional culture and a dynamic seen repeatedly in Dewey’s presidential arc. It is not enough to be “progressive” or “experimental” to succeed at Dewey. Any new president must understand Dewey’s complete arc and history and come with a clear idea of how they will bridge the gaps between old understandings of the institution’s founding philosophies and the skills and compromises needed to run a 21st century institution. This is a difficult balancing act at any institution, in which new presidents must bring a fresh vision to an institution that moves the school forward while still honoring its past (Guskin & Marcy, 2002).

One of the ways in which new presidents and their institutions can accomplish this is by examining the whole of a presidential arc, not just the previous presidency and the immediate institutional circumstances. Many presidential search committees, even those who conduct their searches according to best practices in their field, will confine themselves to creating presidential profiles around variations on three fundamental questions:

1. What are the key challenges, opportunities, and issues that the next president must address within the next several years?
2. What are the essential professional experiences and skills that will qualify someone to successfully address those challenges, opportunities, and issues?
3. What kind of personality will succeed within this institution’s cultural and historical context? (Weary, as cited in Martin & Samels, 2004)

Search committees and consultants too often fail to examine the entire arc of the presidency at their institution, or the reasons for previous successes and failures. Doing so could

be a key to improving the way we search for our presidents and the likelihood that their presidencies will be successful.

Another implication for presidential success and failure that can be drawn from this touchpoint is tendency of each of these schools to become isolated and for their cultures to become self–reinforcing. Each of these schools has a definitive institutional saga, is located in a rural area, and attracts students and faculty who are drawn to its particular ethos and culture. There is a tendency, in each case, to become insular and to reject the ideas of the outside world in ways that can be detrimental to new presidents and to the institution itself. Several Practical interviewees discussed the school as an extension of the personal values of the faculty and students—commitment to work, stewardship of the environment, and appreciation of the outdoors. They have successfully translated those values into a very narrow curricular niche, with programs in ecology, environmental humanities, outdoor education, and sustainable agriculture. However, it remains to be seen whether this is a sustainable model or whether their approach is too narrow. Their new strategic plan makes no reference to developing new academic programs or expanding their offerings beyond their current majors. Several of the goals listed in the plan call for Practical to "reaffirm" their current emphases on work and the outdoors and to create learning outcomes—a move toward assessment and effectiveness that most colleges have long since embraced. Their current president (President E) sees it as his role to help Practical integrate a little better with the wider world while still maintaining its historic values and commitments, and he is optimistic that Practical's emphases on environmental sustainability will enable him to "raise expectations" and build a case statement for financial

support and curricular growth: "This is our time—the whole popular culture is aligned with our mission!" Ironically, given its positive effects in other ways, Practical's willingness to choose presidents with backgrounds more in keeping with their own culture instead of traditional academic paths has reinforced this insularity. President E may buck this trend; he has a terminal degree and experience leading another institution, and those seem to be the most appropriate qualifications for this point in Practical's presidential arc.

Both of the other case institutions were affected by the same tendency to insularity, but in lesser ways. Northern was impacted by a similar insular dynamic at earlier stages of its arc, in which local presidents and board members interacted within a self–contained loop. Of particular note is the past–Olympics period in the early 1980s, when an insular president and board failed to note the ways in which curricular trends were shifting away from forestry and ecology and enrollment plummeted. Presidents B and C were assigned some blame for this by the interviewees, but a self–reinforcing culture of faculty and staff contributed to the dynamic.

Presidents need to recognize this dynamic at insular institutions and find ways to introduce new ideas and help those around them read the environment appropriately. Dewey, in particular, can be subject to a form of groupthink that the former Dean of Students described as "self–referential and self–reverential." This is less salient after the closing of the campus program and the move to low–residency education (Faculty A), but President H, before her abrupt resignation, expressed concern about the impact of this insularity on Dewey's ability to meet external requirements.

Competing cultures. This tendency toward insularity will be even more important to overcome in the years ahead. Higher education is in a state of flux and great transition in response to demographic shifts, the burgeoning of new information delivery systems, challenges to traditional pedagogies, and increased calls from the government and accreditors for every—more accountability, assessment, and effectiveness. Higher education will need to continually reinvent itself to remain relevant and sustainable, and many institutions may close. All three of the case institutions are endangered because of their relatively high cost, isolated locations, and narrowly focused curricula. And the presidents of all three will need to find ways to balance the competing cultures of higher education in ways that have not yet been present in their presidential arcs. Institutions are becoming more outcomes–focused, experimenting with different delivery and program structures, scrutinizing revenues and expenses as never before, and trying hard to find ways to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive marketplace. The very concept of a "marketplace" might have been anathema to the Practical and Dewey communities throughout their histories, and while Northern has a more career–oriented curriculum, it too has been isolated enough to do things its own way for many years.

Higher education institutions will need to adopt more business–like approaches in order to survive. They must have strategic plans and directions, identify outcomes and measure progress toward meeting them, streamline their operations, find innovative ways to do more with less, and keep a sharp eye on the bottom line. This is the "new normal" which every institution faces (Soliday & Mann, 2014). However, there are many in higher education,

particularly at small institutions like the three cases, who would agree with Rita Bornstein when she cites Birnbaum in suggesting that “since higher education is driven by mission and not by profit, its attraction to corporate practices diminishes its distinctiveness and legitimacy” (Bornstein, 2003, p. 6). This statement is even more true in institutional cultures— like all three of the case institutions—that place a high value on social justice, communion with nature, preserving the environment, and the rural culture distinct to New England and Northern New York. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) broadened this tension when they identified six distinct cultures within higher education: collegial, managerial, developmental, advocacy, virtual, and tangible. The Managerial Culture, one “that finds meaning primarily in the organization, implementation, and evaluation of work that is directed towards specified goals and purposes,” (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008, p. 43) is a necessary element at any institution wishing to survive and grow; the organized chaos models of the past (Cohen & March, 1986) will no longer suffice.

Presidents who have worked in higher education for any length of time recognize this need and seek ways to implement it on their campus. This is not a simple task at a place like Dewey, which is dominated by what Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) called an Advocacy Culture, which is one that “finds meaning primarily in the establishment of equitable egalitarian policies and procedures for the distribution of resources and benefits in the institution” (p. 111) or Northern or Practical, examples of a Tangible Culture that “finds meaning in its roots, community, and its . . . grounding . . . [in] a value–based, face–to–face education in an owned physical location” (p. 185).

The presidential arcs of all three institutions, but most especially Dewey's, demonstrate ways in which presidencies succeeded or failed in part due to the ways in which competing cultures were managed. Dewey's President G remains the only leader of that institution who has thus far managed to create new revenue streams and expand successfully to another campus in order to stabilize enrollment. He could do this only because the presidential arc had "ruptured" immediately before he arrived with the closing of the undergraduate campus program. His vision and innovations were accepted and supported because he consciously managed the Managerial and Advocacy Cultures in his approach to his community:

> [I] created a sense of possibility after the most recent turmoil and worked strategically with the different constituencies in ways that were deeply rooted to the mission. A lot of it related to integrity–personal and in terms of rooting actions and plans in the integrity of [Dewey's] mission and history . . . [and I told the community] if [Dewey] can't survive with its integrity, than it doesn't deserve to live. (President G)

In contract, President H was very conscious that "in today's external environment, you can no longer remain 96% tuition–driven and in start–up mode . . . there's too much competition now." She bases her start–up analogy at least partly on the closing of the campus program in 2002, after which Dewey was really a different institution, and she peppered her interview, and her campus remarks, with other business analogies. She saw her role as "trying to honor the past and the history but not immersing in it" rather than following President G's lead in rooting all his proposed changes and innovations in Dewey's presidential arc and institutional saga. And her presidency cannot be considered a success. She left abruptly, with two years to go on her first term, and with few of her goals solidly on the way to being accomplished.

*Legitimacy***.** Bornstein (2003) cites five factors in presidential legitimacy—individual, institutional, environmental, technical, and moral (pp. 25–42). Three of those forms of legitimacy—individual, institutional, and moral—are at play in the presidential arcs of the case institutions. Individual legitimacy refers to an individual's background, experiences, and personal characteristics. Practical's Presidents C and D gained individual legitimacy through their previous work in areas that met Practical's needs. Practical's willingness to hire presidents outside of the traditional academic career path conferred some of this legitimacy on its presidents, an example that other small colleges with distinctive cultures would do well to heed. In contrast, some of Dewey's presidents—notably President D, who came without a search process from a military, Catholic background at odds with Dewey's culture—lacked this legitimacy from the beginning. Some of Northern's presidents—notably Presidents C and D—either had individual legitimacy because they fit in well with the casual culture of the Adirondacks and were outgoing and made personal connections (President D) or because they did just the opposite (President C).

Institutional legitimacy speaks to issues around presidential searches and they ways they are conducted, to governance structures and roles, and, as previously discussed, to how well as president fits in with the institutional culture and mores.

Moral legitimacy derives from an individual's personal conduct and perceived service to the institution and its mission and values. There have been few personal or ethical scandals in the presidential arcs of these institutions, with the exceptions of President E at Northern, who was described as unhinged and unstable, and President B, who was thought to have a drinking

problem. There were some unpleasant issues at Practical during the Presidents B period when they had several presidents in a short period of time, and one sued the institution. Most of the accusations against presidents at Dewey do not stem from perceived wrongdoing as outsiders might understand it. There is no indication, for instance, that any presidents used money for their own personal gain or intervened inappropriately in academic matters. However, all of Dewey's presidents and some of Northern's have fielded accusations of not remaining true to the mission and values of the institution, and can therefore be said to have (fairly or not) lacked moral legitimacy at least some of the time.

The importance of the search process at each institution was the fourth parallel touchpoint, and this is again a touchpoint well addressed in the literature and illustrated by these three cases. Practical addressed the need to select presidents who would understand and thrive in their unique culture by going outside the traditional academic paths and selecting less traditionally qualified individuals as their presidents. Practical's growth as an institution, and the attributed success of Presidents C and D, stemmed from the fact that neither was a traditional candidate for the presidency. President C had a background in outdoor education and President D came from fundraising. Both sets of qualifications were well suited to the needs of the institution at the time they were hired, and their successes in office were due in part to the institution's willingness to "think outside the box" in what they wanted in a leader. The former trustee who chaired the searches for both Presidents C and D described the community–wide needs assessment that was conducted before and during each search in his interview and the

desire of the trustees to choose candidates “most synchronistic with the mission of the institution” without limiting themselves to a standard set of qualifications.

An open and participatory search process based on agreed–upon institutional needs was also crucial to presidential success at both Northern and Dewey. The pattern at Northern was particularly striking; every president who came to office through a search process that was not participatory and open was deemed unsuccessful, both by the definition given in this study and in the eyes of the interviewees. Dewey’s processes were sometimes open and participatory, sometimes not—it depended on the prevailing mood of the governing board. Even when an open process took place, there tended to be suspicion of the process when members of the community did not agree with the president’s subsequent actions. However, there was no chance of success at Dewey if the president was not hired through an open process; the opposition met by those presidents was intense before their tenure even started. (It should be noted that coming to office through an open and participatory process was still no guarantee of presidential success at Dewey).

Practical desperately needed the fundraising skills and connections with the outdoor education community that President C brought with him. Northern needed a leader like President D, with the necessary skills and background to repair faculty relationships and begin to lay the groundwork for future fundraisers. After the campus program closed, Dewey needed President G, who had worked at another institution on the West Coast noted for its commitment to adult education, to form the relationships that could lead to a satellite campus and badly–needed enrollment expansion.

A president who comes to office through a broad and participatory search process will carry a certain level of legitimacy upon entry. What may be even more important is that the new president has been chosen because s/he has a certain set of skills and experiences that are thought to best meet institutional needs. To arrive at that conclusion, the community would have had to undergo deep and strategic reflection and hopefully emerged at some kind of consensus on future directions. It is that reflection, and the consensus that emerges, that will influence the success of the presidency that will follow and grant the incoming president the legitimacy s/he needs.

Several dynamics are at work in these particular presidential arcs. As previously discussed, a comprehensive needs assessment must be one of the first elements in a presidential search process, and these processes need more and deeper reflection than is often the case:

> What is most useful and delusional about searches comes down to the same thing: they consist of rituals that meet our needs as communities but offer little rational analysis of what is required for leadership success—little basis for predicting it, and less for assuring it . . . Committees come up with a composite sketch of a messianic leader who can articulate the true vision…so that all who hear it will at last understand and believe, be a financial whiz, have knockout interpersonal skills, listen closely, be decisive but open, round up major fundraising on the way to the interview, and . . . all losses restore and sorrows end. (Hahn, as cited in McLaughlin, 1996a, p. 74)

A thorough understanding and examination of an institution's entire presidential arc should become part of the deep reflection engaged in by a college or university seeking to hire a new president.

Conclusions and Reflections

> The Cheese stands alone. Presidents have no friends.–President D, Dewey College

> It's difficult to get a presidency, but it's goddamn perilous to get out of one….so many have really crappy endings. – President D, Practical College

I interviewed eight current and former college presidents for this study. Given the difficulties I had faced even gaining access to three case institutions, I started my interviews leery that even those who agreed to speak with me would be careful and guarded and have little to say. Those fears were completely unjustified.

These eight presidents have little in common, really, beyond the fact that they led, or are leading, small higher education institutions in the Northeast. They were smart people, articulate, experienced both in and out of higher education, but they brought to the role strikingly different philosophies to education and leadership. Overwhelmingly, however, they had one thing in common:

They wanted to talk. They needed to talk.

All eight presidents, without exception, startled me with their candor and their willingness to discuss their own shortcomings as well as their strengths. An occasional remark was placed "off the record" or "not for attribution," which requests I have of course honored without exception, but I was amazed at the depth of honesty and analysis they were willing to give me regarding their own presidencies, their relationships with their governing boards and their faculties, the touchpoints in their presidencies and in their institution's presidential arc, and their relative merits compared to their institution's other presidents.

And for many of them, the pain of these recollections was apparent. We isolate our presidents and we make them targets for the slings and arrows of far too many constituencies. Whether their institutions have a history of dysfunctional governance, like Dewey, or a more peaceful presidential arc, like Practical, too often these presidents may find themselves a one person nexus of the hopes and expectations of the governing board to whom they must answer; the faculty with whom they must collegially govern the institution; the students for whom they are responsible; the government and the accreditors whose requirements they must meet; and the alumni and donors whose money they desperately need. They are expected to keep a frenetic pace and to be all things to all people, while their role within the organization leaves them no peers and in many cases few colleagues in whom they can confide or—perhaps more importantly—be vulnerable.

Many of these interviews seemed almost cathartic for the presidents. (The same was true of many other interviewees as well, and there was even one individual who declined an interview because she did not want to relive past hurts. But it was stronger for the presidents.) Even when they recounted incidents or themes that were decades old, pain, anger, and a palpable sense of injustice came through in their responses. Pride came through as well, of course—every president, without exception, could rattle off their accomplishments in office and all the goals they had tried to achieve, even if they fell short. But the more negative emotions, sadly, dominated many of the conversations. They needed to come out! Several individuals told me they had never before been able to express to anyone some of the feelings that arose for them when reviewing the questions and preparing for the interviews.

The higher education presidency, it would seem from the experience of these three institutions and the individuals who have led them, is difficult, sometimes rewarding but just as often disempowering and painful, all–consuming, lonely, and an exhausting walk on a tightrope buffeted by strong winds from all sides. There are many reasons why the leader of any large and complex organization will often feel lonely and under siege, and that is certainly not unique to higher education. But if, as educators in a system of collective governance, we want to strengthen our institutions, we need to collectively find ways to more effectively support our presidents at the same time we hold them accountable.

> You step up to the plate and put your life's energies to the service of this institution, and it is good for the spirit of the institution to honor that. –President F, Dewey College

> [The college community are] such nice people and I feel such a deep responsibility for them . . . after 50 years, wouldn't you hate to be the one when it [closure] finally happens?–President E, Practical College

> The ability of the president to serve as a magic mirror in which the community, in all its diverse roles—when they look at the presidency, they see themselves reflected and in the context of the larger community and its cultural history . . . and if people see themselves and they see a common ground of what they're all doing, then that's what the president can do.–President F, Dewey College

With only one exception, the presidents interviewed expressed great attachment and concern for the institutions they had led and for many—not all—of the people who make up those institutions. Many former presidents were still in touch in various ways, and at least passively continued to support these colleges. This deep sense of attachment was even stronger, of course, for the long–serving faculty and administrators who served far longer than any president, and in many cases had devoted their entire professional lives to these case institutions.

These case institutions were chosen in part because each has a compelling institutional saga, but such a saga certainly does not make them unique, especially among small, private institutions. We feel enormous attachment to our colleges and universities—as faculty and staff, as students, as alumni. We experience strong emotions about these institutions that translate to few other institutions in our lives. And most of us see only a small portion of the tapestry of these institutions. We don’t see the entire institutional budget in most cases; we don’t have any idea of the efforts made to raise external funds. We don’t know what kinds of personnel challenges different areas of the college are addressing; we didn’t get the report on the student who reported a rape last weekend. When the local media runs an unfavorable story about a labor dispute or a student scandal, we have very few details about the situation, and we don’t always remember that. And no matter what we know, or what we think we know, we are interpreting all our information through the lens of our personal experience of the institutional saga—our own understandings of the mission, history, and culture that is the way we experience an institution. In many cases, we don’t *have* to have all the information, or interpret events rationally or evenhandedly. We are fairly free to draw our own conclusions and criticize those who handled an issue “incorrectly.”

The president has no such luxury. The president is ultimately responsible for all the internal challenges and crises that beset every higher education institution, and also for the ever–increasing external requirements of the government and the accreditors. S/he must balance all of these challenges, absorb all the criticisms, and keep the institution financially afloat, within a culture that has not always embraced the calls for greater assessment and

accountability coming at higher education from all directions. Dewey and Practical were very late in creating learning outcomes for their academic programs; it had never been a part of their learner–centered approach to education. (Northern had a more powerful impetus to do so because they so recently added baccalaureate programs.) Strategic plans are newly in place at both Dewey and Practical that call for more external partnerships, financial modeling, enrollment planning, and learning assessment than either institution has ever known. It is a powerful culture clash for each institution, and in both cases a strong understanding of the institution's presidential arc—the intersection of each president's actions with the institutional culture and the external environment—would prove useful for all constituencies to reach common ground.

And common ground is no longer an option. Higher education is changing too rapidly, and the competition for students at all levels is becoming too intense, for the status quo to hold sway. And finding this common ground cannot be the sole responsibility of the President—if we are to survive as institutions and as an autonomous segment of society; all of us—governing boards, faculty, administrators, alumni and donors—need to embrace this cultural shift and make it work.

> You go to your office every day and you wait for events to overtake you.–President C, Practical College

> There comes a point when presidents reach a kind of tired, and it's personal . . . it's a pace that's inhumane—and that doesn't get enough attention in the literature—what it physically and psychologically takes to do it.–President E, Practical College

Presidents are too often set up to fail. The importance of the search process was one of the touchpoints across all three of the case institutions, and there was a clear connection,

particularly at Northern, between an open and participatory search process (or lack thereof) and presidential success (or lack thereof). However, even if a search is open and participatory and conducted according to accepted good practice—hire a consultant, lead the community in a needs assessment, construct a profile of the desired skills and experiences of the next president, delineate the immediate challenges facing the institution—is that the best way to choose the best candidate for an institution at that point in its presidential arc?

Many institutions approach their presidential searches with strong ideas of deficits (financial and metaphorical) that need to be filled. People too often think or say: Our outgoing president was a weak fundraiser and we need money; make sure the presidential profile states clearly that we want someone with a strong background in fundraising. Every institution wants a leader who will be collaborative, open, and strong communicator; "seeking a dictatorial loner" is never to be seen in these position postings. Many colleges want someone with great enrollment experience, an ability to build external partnerships, financial acumen, etc. And many presidential profiles will mention something about the culture and history of an institution and state that the successful candidate will "embody" or "articulate" institutional values.

And what emerges, for the response of aspiring candidates and as a rubric for the search committee, is a set of desired qualities that is often unrealistic and fairly generic. It's the wish list of those who participated in the needs assessment. It probably does not incorporate a long view of the institutional history, delve deep into why previous presidencies succeeded or failed, or approach the next presidency as the complex social construct it is—an intersection of the

individual, the institutional culture, the stakeholders, and the environment. It focuses only on one part of that construct. How do we then expect the resulting presidency to be a success?

> Everybody's well–meaning, everybody wants things to work—but they have different definitions of success. People might feel that they're accomplishing things, but if there isn't a common definition of success and if there aren't indicators and criteria to indicate success, it's hard to build morale and the enrichment of spirit that communities need. – President F, Dewey College

Which brings us back to the question that started this study: *What factors in presidential success or failure can be identified by comparing the arcs and touchpoints of the presidency at small private colleges and universities*? And how can we define what will make a presidency a success?

In calling for a definition of presidential success, I am not referring to goals set for a president by the governing board as part of the evaluation process. Many boards will require a president to meet certain fundraising goals, for instance, or direct her/him to produce certain enrollment or financial results. The measures of these goals will be the basis for a president's annual performance review. That may be a framework to define the success of a *president*; what is needed is a way to define the success of a *presidency* and then to create the structures and climate to best ensure that success.

Some Final Thoughts

> Change is for the better…the strength of higher education is the joint governance and not the business ramrod model. – President H, Northern College

Look to new theories. Many of our conceptions of the higher education presidency are firmly rooted in leadership theories that are outdated as higher education and its environment rapidly evolve in a complex world. Re–examining the roots of our current conceptions of the

presidency can lead to more compelling models of higher education leadership. To do so, it is necessary to look briefly at some of the older theories from which our understandings of higher education leadership is drawn, and then to contrast them with newer theories and models that are more relevant to 21st century presidential success.

Traits approach: The great man theory. Some of the earliest attempts to scientifically study leadership focused on the traits or personality characteristics of great leaders (Northouse, 2006, p. 15). The premise was that successful leaders in politics, the military, and business were successful because they shared certain seminal traits, and if those traits could be identified, leadership could be better understood, predicted, and perhaps even developed. The emphasis in trait theories was solidly on the leader himself (generally, the leaders studied were male, and the studies relied far too heavily on great, white men in history, thus negating the leadership contributions of women and people of color), rather than the relationships between leaders and followers. Some of the leadership traits identified in various 20th century studies included intelligence, self–confidence, persistence, motivation, and initiative (Northouse, 2006, p. 18). These theories not only focused on white males, but they heavily examined military, political and business leaders, which left little room for other forms of leadership.

This “great man” or traits school of leadership theory coincides neatly with the popular imagination of early college presidents that still permeates our educational institutions, and as we have seen in the three case institutions, helps founding presidents exert undue influence over their institutions long after their tenures have ended. The emphasis on the leadership skills and attributes of a single president does not take into account the leadership and goal

attainment possible at other levels of the institution, and is unsuited to the realities of modern leadership.

Skills approach: College leadership as management. The skills approach, like the traits approach, first came to prominence in the 1950s but has seen more focus in recent decades (Northouse, 2006, p. 39). Like the traits approach, skills theorists maintain that leadership derives from personal characteristics of a leader rather than his or her relationship with followers or any situational context. However, in this school of thought, leadership ability rests on specific competencies: "*skills* are what leaders can *accomplish*, whereas traits are who leaders *are*" (p. 40). The earliest skills theorists focused on three broad areas of competence: technical, human, and conceptual skills, and drew sharp distinctions between the level of each skills needed at different levels of the organization (Northouse, 2006, pp. 40–43). In this model, top management, such as college presidents, would need a higher level of conceptual skills (what the traits theorists might call "intelligence" or "vision") and a lower level of technical skill then department heads, who need more job–specific knowledge but who may be called upon for less strategy, planning, or global perspective. The skills approach is more democratic than the traits approach in that it supposes that leadership consists of skills that can be learned and developed by many people, rather than inherent traits with which only a chosen few are born. However, it is still a fairly stratified approach that conceptualizes leadership as a largely individual pursuit rather than a group process, and sharply delineates the skills necessary at different levels of a hierarchical structure. While skills theories are more inclusive than trait

theories, they still place too much emphasis on individual leaders, rather than leadership process or followers, and hence do not take into account the group dynamics of leadership.

Berquist and Pawlak (2008) drew heavily on the skills theory of leadership when they identified the “managerial culture” as one of six distinct and competing academic cultures in higher education. While there is much room for skills approach to understanding leadership, especially as individual institutions seek presidents with more traditional “business management” abilities in financially difficult times, this school of thought still places much emphasis on one individual—the president. And it contributes to our tendency to set our presidents up for failure because we expect them to be omniscient stewards of our institutions independent of the leaders around them or the institutional environment.

Transformational and transactional leadership. Transformational and transactional leadership are often presented as opposites, although most examples of leadership in the real world probably carry elements of both. Bass offered a continuum that moves from transformational leadership through transactional leadership toward laissez–faire leadership (little or no effort at all on the part of the leader) (Northouse, 2006, p. 180). Transforming leaders, as described by James McGregor Burns, “define public values that embrace the supreme and enduring principles of a people . . . they are the inspiration and guide to people who pursue and seek to shape change” (Burns, 2004, p. 29). Transformational leaders motivate their followers, seek to meet their needs, and involve everyone in the enterprise in attaining mutual objectives. The best presidents do this; they set forth a vision for their institutions, gain support by engaging with stakeholders, and create goals and plans that involve everyone at the

institution. And they accomplish this while still engaging in the myriad instances of transactional leadership that keep an institution running each day. Unlike the traits and skills schools of thought, moreover, transformational and transactional leadership theory focuses on the relationships between the leader and followers instead of placing the burden of leadership solely on one individual. It does not, however, account for the many different types and levels of leadership found in complex systems like colleges and universities.

Models for future leadership. In complex organizations with a tradition of shared governance, like institutions of higher education, leadership cannot be conceptualized as an individual process. The tradition of the academy is one of vigorous debate within loosely decentralized structures. The problem with the application of earlier theories of leadership, as well as with the current structure of the college presidency, is that they vest too much significance in one individual—the president—and expect that person to influence thousands of people toward the completion of various and competing sets of goals. At even the smallest institutions, this is a difficult task; at larger and more bureaucratic schools, it becomes an impossible one and the president an overworked figurehead. Newer theorists have evolved models and theories that may better integrate these and other, older threads into a mosaic more suited for 21st century higher education.

Shared leadership. Shared leadership theory emerges from organizational and leadership research conducted throughout the twentieth century. Pearce and Conger (2003) define it as

> a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both . . . The key distinction between shared leadership and traditional models of leadership is that the influence process involves more than just downward influence on subordinates by an appointed or elected leader . . . leadership is broadly distributed among a set of individuals instead of centralized in the hands of a single individual who acts in the role of a superior. (p. 1)

Pearce and Conger (2003, pp. 7–9) list and briefly explain several major threads characteristic of shared leadership:

A. Human relations and social systems approaches to leadership, in which leadership is conceptualized as a social process in which leaders and followers influence each other according to the needs of the situation and leaders are encouraged to work to motivate and understand their followers within their unique context;

B. Role differentiation in groups, in which individual contributions are of equal importance, instead of sole reliance on the designated leader;

C. Co–leadership in many different variations (mentor–protégé, two–person leadership of groups, vertical leadership, etc.);

D. Social exchange theory, which suggests that all interpersonal relationships are Based on patterns of influence that carry with them rewards and costs; in a group, which leadership and influence can be shared in loose and horizontal ways, rather than merely following the group's formal structure;

E. Management by objectives and participative goal setting, in which everyone in the group, not just the leader, shares the responsibility for the desired outcomes—and, in some sense, therefore its leadership.

Shared leadership could be a highly effective model for higher education, directly evolving from the academic tradition of shared governance. An organization as complex as a college or university, with its multiple shareholders and decentralized units, each with competing and even conflicting goals to be achieved through limited resources, cannot be maximally led in a hierarchical model. Higher education is fundamentally dissimilar to the business models that have dominated the study of leadership and organizational structures thus far; a college president does not enjoy the directive authority of a CEO. The culture and traditions of higher education do not allow for that kind of power and authority to be vested in a single leader.

Post–industrial leadership. Rost (1993) argues that older theories of leadership are actually theories of management on an outdated industrial model, in which leaders define the aims of an organization and compel followers to carry them out through largely transactional means. This model, which may have been appropriate for industry and business in the mid– twentieth century, is outdated and inappropriate for higher education, despite the many "shopping lists" of skills and experiences we typically create for our new presidents.

Rost (1993) proposes what he terms a model of "post–industrial leadership," defined as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (1993, p. 102). In this model, leadership is multidirectional and noncoercive; leaders and followers enter into leadership relationships willingly and fluidly, with roles changing and evolving according to circumstances. While the relationships between leaders and followers are not equal, the followers are active participants and there may be

multiple leaders. The purpose of the leader–follower relationships is to produce significant change, or more likely many changes, through a series of common purposes established through influence, not coercion (Rost, 1993, pp. 102–123).

This mirrors what successful higher education presidents often seek to accomplish. Their relationship with their most important stakeholders, the faculty and trustees, are in no sense coercive; both groups enjoy considerable autonomy, and in the case of faculty, frequently tenure or other long–term employment contracts. Leadership can be seen in many contexts and at different levels of the organization; in fact, many of the essential functions of a college or university (i.e., curriculum) are out of the president's hands. Change is always intended and necessary as a result of a president's leadership activities. The key—which some unsuccessful presidents fail to note—is that change must be channeled through common purpose. Both Northern and Dewey had failed presidencies because incumbents operated from an industrial mentality in which they intended to impose change and purpose on the institution through fiat or coercion. In Rost's (1993) conception, that is not leadership; it is perhaps, management, and poor management at that. To be a truly successful post–industrial leader, it is essential to unite multiple campus leaders and followers in common purpose to effect lasting change (1993).

Complexity and chaos theory. Aptly, for institutions that Cohen and March (1986) once dubbed "organized chaos," complexity and chaos theory fits well with the realities of modern higher education. Drawing from Rost (1993) and Heifetz (1994), complexity and chaos theories challenge earlier (what Rost terms "industrial") models of leadership. Structures that emphasize task differentiation, rigid control, and hierarchy are ill–suited to a complex world. They do not

allow the agility and quick response that modern institutions—most especially colleges and universities—need to embrace to survive. To thrive in our rapidly changing world, higher education needs to embrace a certain amount of chaos by breaking down rigid structures and silos, forming partnerships and collaborations both within and outside institutions, devolving more autonomy and leadership capability on different levels of the organization, and embracing structures and processes that allow for greater creativity and flexibility (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006, pp. 39–45).

The next few decades will be a defining era in higher education, and presidents who wish to succeed will need to guide their institutions in reconceptualizing their own and others' roles. They will need to abandon the models in which they were educated and in which they spent their earlier careers. They will not, and cannot, be the "great men" and women of the past, nor can their roles be narrowed to a pat listing of skills and qualities in a job description or presidential search prospectus. Presidents of the future will need to embrace chaos, flexibility, and forms of distributed and joint leadership so they and their institutions will thrive.

Redefine our expectations of the presidency. Everyone at an institution—the governing board, faculty and staff, and supporters—is responsible for the success and failure of a presidency. Presidents must not be a convenient target, like they so frequently are at Dewey, nor a somewhat distant figure to be embraced or ignored depending on your outlook, as they have been at Northern. This may sound obvious, but the tradition of intellectual debate and principled dissent in higher education overlooks one important fact that the business world has grasped from the beginning: It is not enough to discuss and debate; we must act and accomplish

specific, tangible, and measurable outcomes for which we will be held accountable. The community at Dewey must shift its endless governance debate from a theoretical to an instrumental construct: what sort of governance do we need for what we want to *do*?

That means that in redefining our expectations for our presidencies, we must also redefine our expectations for ourselves, through the search process and at all points during the presidency. How do we help our presidencies succeed? We must have clear systems of governance that include not only rights and prerogatives but also accountabilities. We must understand that the ways we have conducted business, especially at small and insular institutions, cannot continue. We must set clear expectations of openness and collaboration for our presidents and governing boards, and clear expectations for our faculty, staff, and alumni of willingness to embrace change and support for clearly–defined institutional goals.

And we must create a default expectation of success. It is far too easy to criticize the president or the ubiquitous “administration” for anything with which we do not agree, as many Northern interviewees did. It is far too easy for presidents and governing boards to blame an intransigent faculty for blocking change and progress, as they have at Dewey. It is far too easy to immerse ourselves so deeply in our mission and values that we simply disregard much of what a president may do, as happened at Practical during the period of maximum turnover. Except in extraordinary situations of personal inadequacy or malfeasance, if a presidency fails, we all share that failure, and we all share the negative impact on the institution of that failure. Every segment of the campus community must find ways to share responsibility for a presidency’s success.

Jointly plan for success. We can help create that default expectation of success by jointly planning for it as a community. No one can anticipate the specific challenges an institution will face during an individual presidency. But we can examine the common touchpoints in these presidential arcs, and the touchpoints in the arc of our own institutions, to do the following:

- Clarify our governance roles and make sure that the incoming president, the board of trustees, the faculty, administration, and other campus stakeholders clearly understand them;
- Provide development and training for boards of trustees on their role and interactions with presidents and with others in the campus community;
- Take a hard look at our campus cultures and understand how they impact the presidency, as well as other aspects of the institution, in both positive and negative ways;
- Look outside our own institutions–keep abreast of curricular and societal trends, and grasp the wider changes taking place in higher education;
- Be deliberate in our hiring practices so that we choose faculty and staff who not only embrace our institutional values but can enhance them by bringing fresh perspectives and new ideas instead of reinforcing our current practices;
- Fully participate in presidential searches with the entire presidential arc in mind, and commit to playing a role in the success of the resulting presidency.

Understand the presidential arc. We need to more fully understand the concept of the presidential arc as well as the arcs and touchpoints of our own institutions. For the purposes of this study, the presidential arc was defined as a comprehensive examination of:

- Each individual presidency, or, at institutions with a history of short–term or interim presidents who left little impact on an institution, groups of presidencies;
- The level of success of each presidency, as determined by a definition shared with all correspondents or interviewees;
- The institutional culture, history, and self–defined “saga” (Clark, 1972);
- Environmental factors that significantly impact individual presidencies or the institutional history (i.e., enrollment trends, the national or regional economy and its effects on fundraising and the institution’s finances, trends in curriculum, shifts in the national higher education culture, etc.)

The results of this study showed that this is indeed a valuable and insightful way in which to frame presidential success and failure. Examining the presidential arcs at these three institutions created a wider perspective of success and failure than could have been the case in studying only one presidency. Several trends and ongoing issues, or touchpoints, emerged from each arc as influencing factors across an institution’s history, and were found through comparison with the arcs of other institutions to be phenomena not restricted to one institution. We can, and have drawn conclusions from the comparisons of these arcs, and we can search other arcs for the touchpoints and insights they yield.

Change the way we search for our presidents. We need to search for presidents in the context of the presidential arc instead of creating our usual wish lists. We need to know whether and why previous presidencies succeeded or failed, and what touchpoints influenced those successes and failures. We need to approach our searches with the understanding that all campus constituencies will share responsibility for the success or failure of the resulting presidency. And we must follow the advice of Dewey's President F—find ways to embrace and attain a common definition of presidential success that raises our morale, enhances our spirits, and writes a new and hopeful chapter in our institutional sagas.

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