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What Do I Do Now?: Tackling Higher Education Adaptive Leadership Challenges

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1) Presentation Title: What Do I Do Now?: Tackling Higher Education Adaptive Leadership Challenges

2) Presenter Information-Primary presenter CV/resume or biographical sketch:

Jill Channing

Dr. Jill Channing serves as Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, Interim Chair for the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department, and Associate Director of the Center for Community College Leadership. Previously, Dr. Channing served as Dean of Liberal Arts at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, NV. She also held appointments as Associate Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences at Kankakee Community College in Kankakee, IL and as Director of Writing Programs and English Department Head at Mitchell Community College in Statesville, NC. She has over a decade of experience leading academic departments and teaching in higher education. She earned a B.A. and an M.A. in English from Wright State University in Dayton, OH. Dr. Channing also holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Cultural Studies from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Dr. Channing has published articles and presented on various topics related to teaching writing and literature, culture and education, and higher education leadership

3) Disciplines: Education; Educational Leadership; Higher Education Administration

4) Presentation Theme: Higher education leadership

5) Presentation Type: best practice presentation (50 minutes)

6) Abstract: The presenter and participants will discuss current trends, policy issues, and adaptive challenges influencing higher education institutions. Through discussions of research and case scenarios, participants will analyze adaptive leadership strategies and best practices for chairs to develop departmental cultures that are responsive to adaptive challenges.

7) Keywords: Adaptive leadership, adaptive challenges, organizational culture, academic leadership, competency/professional development

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9) Presentation Documents: Description of the Session (300-500 words)

In February of 2020, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities published its report on the top ten policy issues for the upcoming year. The report began its overview of the upcoming year on a positive note, discussing the “hope and confidence in the policy arena, with the tailwinds of a strong national economy, healthier state budgets.” The report goes on to rank the election, the economy, state budgets and college affordability, economic and workforce development, and immigration as the top five policy issues of 2020. Although these certainly are top policy issues and will be on all college and university leaders’ minds, COVID-19 has dominated leaders’ attention.

The COVID-19 outbreak has demonstrated the importance of the development of adaptive leadership competency. Adaptive leadership requires leaders to do more than “think ahead,” collaborate, or brainstorm. Adaptive capacity requires leaders to respond to adaptive challenges, which are not easy problems to identify or solve only with the leader’s power or knowledge or even the normal ways of solving problems at the institution (Northouse, 2019). Also, these challenges, such as COVID-19 related issues on college and university campuses, are difficult because they require people to change their ways of doing things, values, beliefs, and roles in an organization. To frame and contextualize this discussion, I will present results of an extensive literature review of research and evidenced-based studies examining adaptive leadership challenges, development, and practice, as well as interviews with 12 academic leaders who engaged in adaptive leadership. From this research, I identified leader strategies to guide institutions and leaders to develop adaptive leadership capacity and to shape cultures where administrators, faculty, and staff are responsive to adaptive challenges. Although the leaders discussed in the literature and those who participated in the interviews faced a variety of adaptive challenges, several themes that suggest strategies for contending with adaptive challenges emerged: carefully tailored communication, a sense of dissociation from the problem yet not totally stepping away from it, taking time to listen to multiple and diverse perspectives and to analyze the problem, sensitive management of one’s and one’s followers’ emotional responses, the effective empowerment of others when they may want to avoid change, and the use of data to challenge assumptions. After this discussion of research and best practices, we will discuss several case study scenarios to understand strategies and best practices for the development of adaptive leadership competencies and ways chairs can increase departments’ capacities to address adaptive challenges.

American Association of State Colleges and Universities. (2020). Top 10 higher education state policy issues for 2020. *Policy matters: A higher education policy brief*. <https://www.aascu.org/policy/publications/policy-matters/Top102020.pdf>

Northouse, P. G. (2019). *Leadership: theory and practice*. Eighth Edition. SAGE.