ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE CONFLICT:

# THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE LONG-TERM DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSON IN HIGHER EDUCATION 

$\qquad$
A Dissertation

Presented to
The College of Graduate and Professional Studies
Department of Education Leadership
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
$\qquad$
by
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May 2021
Keywords: organizational role conflict, department chairperson, department head, higher educational leadership, organizational behavior

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#### Abstract

This study is a hermeneutic investigation into the phenomenon of organizational role conflict as experienced by five long-term department chairpersons, four long-term department heads, and two former long-term department chairpersons working at universities and colleges located in Indiana, Illinois, and Massachusetts. Organizational role conflict for department chairpersons and department heads is a byproduct of their frontline manager position. By occupying a position between the collegiate and administrative branches of their institution, these managers serve as an important link in the chain of command, but suffer from ambiguous, contradictory, and competing expectations placed on them because of their hybrid status as faculty members and administrators. Over six decades of research has established organizational role conflict as elemental to the department chairperson position, yet people who occupy this position on a long-term basis are neglected in these investigations, while the conflict of department heads has not been fully examined. This study addresses these deficiencies in the research canon, as it provides an examination of the long-term frontline manager's experience of organizational role conflict in academe. In-depth interviews and field notes were used to collect data, which were analyzed through the lenses of organizational role theory and organizational and management theory. Study findings indicate that the participants, guided by a strong sense of purpose and duty, mitigate their organizational role conflict while enacting their frontline manager role by employing strategies and embracing perspectives that reinforce their hybrid roles as scholar/educators and frontline administrators.


## PREFACE

I came upon my dissertation topic while attending a daylong workshop on leadership in higher education. At that time, I was working as a library administrator at a medium-sized research university. One of the speakers that morning was a management expert. Early in his presentation, he introduced the concept of how to supervise faculty, which prompted rumblings from the audience. Several in attendance interrupted him, remarking that his management techniques would be insulting to faculty, who resist being managed by others. Many of those voicing their concerns identified themselves as department chairpersons. As one attendee said to the speaker, "If I tried to supervise my faculty, I wouldn't be chair for long!"

I felt a bit sorry for the speaker, who was visibly flummoxed by these outbursts. As I glanced at the faces in attendance, I spotted a colleague. When our eyes met, he smiled and offered a knowing expression in recognition for what was transpiring at the front of the room. I smiled back at my colleague and then turned my attention once again to the speaker, who had composed himself and was calmly listening to the unsolicited corrections proffered by members of the audience. The speaker acknowledged their comments, completed the rest of his presentation, and exited the podium. Then, the workshop organizer announced a 15 -minute break.

As others were lining up by the buffet tables to grab a cup of coffee, I went out onto a patio for some fresh air. There, I encountered my colleague. We chatted about the speaker's predicament, which led to a brief discussion on the peculiarities of managing in higher education.

I asked my colleague, "You've been a department chair for decades. How many other chairs are serving for as long at the university?" He responded, "Oh, there are only about three or four of us." I knew that long-term department chairpersons, like my colleague, were rare. Owing to the tradition of distributed leadership in higher education, the department chairperson position is customarily rotated for two to three year terms among the faculty members within a department. However, I had never stopped to think about those who occupy the chairperson position longterm. "Well," I said, "if managing in academe is so difficult, why have you done it for so long?" In response, he laughed and said, "I don't know! I've been able to do some good work for the department and the students without annoying too many people. That's probably why they let me continue. But I don't really know, sometimes, why I continue. There are many reasons, probably."

In attempting to explain further, he observed that people immediately notice when things go horribly wrong, but they seldom ask questions when things run smoothly, and that his long tenure as chairperson, with the exception of a few hiccups, has mostly run smoothly. "I can't fully answer your question," he said, "if something is taken for granted, it generally isn't given the attention it deserves." At that point, I realized that the experiences of the long-term department chairperson might make a viable topic for my dissertation. I immediately excused myself to find a quiet corner to write down everything that had transpired that morning because, as I jotted in my notebook, "I think I'm onto something." It is my hope that this inquiry will encourage others to study long-term department chairpersons and other long-term academic managers in higher education, since these people have valuable insight into the workings of the contemporary college and university.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents, Martha, Thomas, Sara, and John, my parents, Martha and Anthony, my brother, David, and my sister, Barbara. I cannot think of a better way to describe their presence in my life than to write, "God gave us memory, so that we might have roses in December" (Barrie, 1922, p. 1).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my good fortune to be beholden to many people during my doctoral journey. I thank them here in no particular order. I am deeply indebted to my dissertation committee, Dr. C. Jack Maynard, Dr. Barbara Eversole, and Dr. Bradley Balch for their careful attention, expert direction, and graciousness in guiding me to complete this dissertation. Their patience and discernment has made me a better researcher. I especially commend my committee chair, Jack Maynard, for his advice and kindness. In addition, I thank my previous committee chair, Dr. Joshua Powers, former Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at Indiana State University, and current Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at William Paterson University, for his knowledgeable and enthusiastic guidance in the early stages of my research. It has been a privilege to know and work with these scholars.

I also thank the dedicated professors in my doctoral program, Dr. Mark Frederick, Dr. Hemalatha Ganapathy-Coleman (now at the University of Toronto), Dr. Kandace Hinton, Dr. Mary Howard-Hamilton, Dr. George McClellan (now at the University of Mississippi), Dr. Kand McQueen, and Dr. LaWanda Ward (now at Penn State University). In considering my appreciation for these people, I am mindful of Ward's (1968) observation of teachers. "The mediocre teacher tells," he wrote, "the good teacher explains; the superior teacher demonstrates; the great teacher inspires" (p. 16). These talented educators have certainly inspired me. Further, I extend my appreciation to the following people from Indiana State University: to Dr. Michael Chambers, thank you for supervising my doctoral internship; to Dr. Virgil Sheets and Dr. John

Conant, thank you for your feedback on my interview protocol; to Dr. Robert English, Dr. Jay Gatrell (now at Eastern Illinois University), Dr. Sue Kiger, Dr. C. Jack Maynard, and Dr. Susan Powers, thank you for snipping a piece of red tape that had the potential to derail my studies; to Dr. H. Scott Davis, thank you for your friendship and encouragement; to Dr. Robert Perrin, thank you for your golden insight; and to Dr. Bailey Bridgewater, thank you for your guidance and generous advice.

I thank my former library colleagues, Shelly Gessler, LPC, RYT of Karuna Wellness, and Cinda May, Associate Librarian and Digital Preservation Strategist at the University of Notre Dame, who recommended me to the Ph.D. program, and who continue to enrich my life with their loving friendship. I also thank my fellow doctoral students in Cohort 18, as I have benefited greatly by their camaraderie. I single out fellow cohort member, former library colleague, and friend, Dr. Andrea Boehme, Director of Access Services at Bowling Green State University, for her kindness and good humor. Many thanks also goes to Dr. Dennis George, Associate Dean, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at Western Kentucky University, for our conversation on department chairperson and department head positions at his institution. I also thank the hundreds of university and college presidents, vice presidents, chancellors, vice chancellors, provosts, deans, associate deans, department chairpersons, department heads, professors, and instructors who took the trouble to respond when I reached out to them to identify, locate, and recruit the study participants.

Studying for a doctorate while working fulltime requires an almost ridiculous level of stamina, optimism, and faith. These qualities alone, however, are not sufficient. During the course of my studies, I have benefited from the goodwill of my administrators. Without their support, I would not have made it. I thank Dean and University Librarian, Alberta Davis Comer
at the University of Utah, and former Dean of Library Services at Indiana State University, for believing in me, for supporting me in applying to the Ph.D. program, and for giving me my first opportunity to serve as an academic administrator. I continue to benefit from Alberta's example of kindness, consummate professionalism, and strong work ethic.

I also thank my current dean, Robin Crumrin, Dean of Library Services at Indiana State University, for continuing to support my educational pursuits with great generosity of spirit. Robin has shown faith in me by expanding my repertoire of specialties in librarianship in a way that supports my goals while addressing our shared institutional mission. She is a leader of great insight, warmth, and wisdom. In researching the academic frontline manager, I recognize my own, excellent chairperson, Stephen Patton, Associate Librarian and Chair of Library Systems at Indiana State University. Stephen is a collaborative, caring, and intelligent leader who has become a dear friend. He has been incredibly supportive of my education, while steering me in exciting career directions with a delicate, deft touch.

Many thanks goes to my employer, Indiana State University, for its generous employee tuition assistance policy, and for fostering a culture in which each person's success is everyone's success. Likewise, I thank the good people in the Bayh College of Education (BCOE) at Indiana State University. The BCOE has been a challenging and caring educational home to me, and provided financial assistance by bestowing on me the J. Fred Swalls Award in School Administration in 2016, and the Dr. Alfred L. and Juanita R. Harding Family Scholarship in Higher Education Administration in 2015, 2016, and 2017. I also thank the College of Graduate and Professional Studies at Indiana State University for working in tandem with the BCOE to shepherd dissertations, like mine, from preparation through to completion.

My heartfelt thanks goes to my colleagues and dear friends, Valentine Muyumba, Librarian and Chair of Technical Services at Indiana State University, and Kathy Gaul, Librarian Emerita at Indiana State University, for their enthusiastic encouragement of my studies, and for their generous assistance with my travel to participants' institutions. I also thank my library colleague and friend, Paula Forbes, Access Services Manager at Indiana State University, for her kindness and assistance with my preliminary oral examination. My deep appreciation also goes to my colleague, Natalie Bulick, Associate Librarian at Indiana State University, for the gift of her friendship and for managing Indiana State University's online repository of doctoral dissertations, including mine. In addition, I thank my library colleagues and friends, Beverly Grubb and Deb Taylor, for providing the good humor and support that helped to keep me sane and grounded. I thank the dedicated staff of Access Services, and Resource Sharing Services in the Cunningham Memorial Library at Indiana State University, who efficiently and cheerfully obtained materials for my literature review. Many thanks also goes to the members of Indiana State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), who work tirelessly out of the limelight to protect the rights of study subjects and participants. I especially thank IRB members, Dr. Anne Foster and Dr. Ryan Donlan, for their assistance with my research protocol.

I cannot find the words to convey the true depth of my feelings for my dear friend and first academic mentor, Margit Codispoti, Associate Librarian Emerita at Indiana UniversityPurdue University Fort Wayne. I am blessed by Margit's steady friendship, canny advice, and loving-kindness. She has helped to make me a better writer and, I hope, a better person. Margit's remarkable mother, the late Dr. Irja Piirma, Professor Emerita of Polymer Science at the University of Akron, serves as my model of dedication and fortitude. As a graduate of the Technische Hochshule Darmstadt, she immigrated with her family to the United States in 1949.

In 1960, she became the first woman to earn a Ph.D. from the University of Akron, where she went on to have a long and distinguished career. My happy memories of Irja sustained me whenever I felt overwhelmed by my doctoral studies.

Another critical inspiration is my loving and supportive brother, Dr. Robert J. Frey, Research Professor in the Department of Applied Mathematics and Statistics at Stony Brook University. Robert earned his B.S. and Ph.D. from Stony Brook while working fulltime in the corporate sector and distinguishing himself as an award winning entrepreneur, civic leader, and philanthropist. I thank Robert for his excellent example, which allowed me to dream of someday studying for a doctorate while still being a fulltime working stiff. Many, many thanks goes to my wonderfully unique brother and childhood companion, Roddy, for believing in me, and for creating the images in this dissertation. In addition, I thank my big brother Jack, and my lovely sisters-in-law Ineke, Kathy, and Evelyn, all of whom sustain and inspire me. I am also blessed to be aunt, grandaunt, great-grandaunt, and cousin to a host of truly fantastic people.

Lastly, I thank my study participants for generously giving me their valuable trust, time, and energy. Without their willingness to think deeply about their experiences and perspectives, and ability to articulate the same, I would not have been able to write this dissertation. I encountered my study participants near the end of my doctoral program. To me, their individual stories were a compelling prospect seen from a steep mountain that was worth climbing. They are special people, and I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to meet them.

While I characterize my doctoral journey as that of scaling a mountain, an alternate description of the experience is that it is,
like becoming all of the Seven Dwarves. In the beginning, you are Dopey and Bashful. In the middle, you are usually sick (Sneezy), tired (Sleepy), and irritable (Grumpy). But at the end, they call you Doc, and then you're Happy. (Azuma, 1997/2019, para. 10) I am happy. Mostly, I am so very grateful to all those who have assisted me in making this journey of a lifetime.

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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

In 1981, Tucker published the first comprehensive English-language book on the work of the department chairperson in higher education. In the forward to Tucker's (1981) book, J. W. Peltason, President of the American Council on Education, wrote, "An institution can run for a long time with an inept president but not for long with inept chairpersons" (p. xi). Peltason's view is held by many who believe that department chairpersons occupy a critical organizational position within the institutional infrastructure of higher education because they serve as a link between the faculty and central administration (Allen, 2003; Aziz et al., 2005; Bowman, 2002; Chu, 2012; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Hecht et al., 1999; Hoyt \& Spangler, 1979; Lucas, 2000; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993).

Due to differences in job function and institutional perspective, department faculty and university administrators make up two distinct subcultures inhabiting different areas within the organizational infrastructure (Birnbaum, 1988, 1992; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Rourke \& Brooks, 1964; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993). This differentiation results in "executives [administrators] and faculty form[ing] separate and isolated conclaves in which they are likely to communicate only with people similar to themselves" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 7). By taking on an organizational role situated between these two subcultures, the department chairperson
experiences a type of stress that has been termed role conflict (Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Lucas, 2000; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993).

Since Tucker's (1981) book was published, an extensive body of research has grown establishing role conflict as being inherent in the organizational position of department chairperson (Berdrow, 2010; Brawer et al., 2006; Buckholdt \& Miller, 2009; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Hancock, 2007; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Riley \& Russell, 2013; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993; Wolverton et al., 1999). The few investigations on academic leadership noting length of term for department chairpersons suggest that terms of 6 years or less is customary. However, some faculty become long-term chairpersons (Adler, 1984; Welch, 1996) who occupy the position longer than 6 years (Carroll \& Wolverton 2004; Cassie et al., 2007). Although the literature is replete with studies dealing with the role conflict of department chairpersons in general, there has been a lack of scholarly attention paid to the experiences of seasoned, longterm chairpersons in higher education, such as those serving in this role for longer than 6 years. Consequently, we have no clear indication of how department chairpersons with longer terms of service to their institutions experience, conceptualize, or negotiate role conflict within their organizations.

## Background of the Problem

In higher education, faculty work within academic departments and focus on teaching and scholarship while administrators focus on the executive management of the organization as a whole (Bok, 2013; Bowen \& Tobin, 2015; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Tucker, 1981, 1993). The department chairperson, as part faculty member and part administrator, experiences organizational role conflict due to the adoption of these divergent foci (Booth, 1982; Burns \& Gmelch, 1995; Lane, 1967; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Rabinowitz \& Stumpf, 1987; Schaffer,

1987; Sharma, 1971; Singleton, 1987; Wolverton et al., 1999). Role conflict for an individual is the state "of congruency-incongruency or compatibility-incompatibility in the requirements of the role, where congruency or compatibility is judged relative to a set of standards or conditions that impinge upon role performance" (Rizzo et al., 1970, p. 155). Because the job of the department chairperson is an amalgam of different and often competing administrative, teaching, and research responsibilities (Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Hecht et al., 1999; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Potgieter et al., 2010; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993), many in the position experience "the classic person-in-the-middle role; their academic future is tied firmly to the [academic] department, but [their success is] also directly related to the quality of their working relationship with the dean" (McCarty \& Reyes, 1987, p. 4).

Describing the position of chairperson as a "person-in-the-middle role" (McCarty \& Reyes, 1987, p. 4) does not just suggest the chairperson's membership in the two subcultures of the faculty and the administration; it also aptly describes the chairperson's frontline management position within the organizational infrastructure (Birnbaum, 1988; Hecht et al., 1999; Mintzberg, 1979). Frontline management is a term used to describe administrative practices occurring closest to the core business practices of the organization (Mintzberg, 1979). As the administrator of the basic teaching unit of the organization, the academic department, the chairperson operates on the front lines of the organization by working directly with department faculty (Tucker, 1981, 1993).

The classification of department chairpersons as managers can elicit reactions ranging from "amusement to irritation" (Tucker, 1993, p. 388) from faculty because they "react negatively to terminology used by management specialists and are skeptical of programs designed to enhance the management skills of their department chairpersons" (Tucker, 1993, p.
387). "Colleges and universities," noted Zemsky (2001), "tend to see themselves as entities that differ fundamentally from other organizations, but the reality is that the managerial skills required [to manage in higher education] are very similar to those of other organizations" (p. 1). In spite of their faculty status, department chairpersons take on many of the same organizational and functional roles as the frontline manager in business and industry (Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Sharma, 1969, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993: Zemsky, 1990). Moreover, "as frontline managers," Hecht et al. (1999) wrote, "department chairs serve more than one constituency, a fact that requires department chairs to assume multiple roles. Chairs are the primary spokespersons for department faculty, staff, and students" (p.24). However, while the chairperson position can be a source of organizational role conflict, it is precisely this position that is cited as being critical to institutional success (Allen, 2003; Aziz et al., 2005; Bowman, 2002; Hecht et al., 1999; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Lucas, 2000; Mintzberg, 1979; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993).

By being a strategic conduit between the "separate and isolated conclaves" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 7) of the teaching and administrative branches of the institution, the department chairperson provides organizational cohesion and stability (Aziz et al., 2005; Czech \& Forward, 2010; Gmelch \& Burns, 1994; Hecht et al., 1999; London, 2011; Sotirakou, 2004; Spiller, 2010; Wescott, 2000). A similar institutional dynamic has been noted in business and industry, where studies suggest that "organizational performance is heavily influenced by what happens in the middle of organizations, rather than at the top" (Currie \& Proctor, 2005, p. 1325), and that the role of the mid-level and frontline manager has great potential to exert strategic influence both upward and downward within an organizational hierarchy (Ahearne et al., 2014; Carroll \& Wolverton, 2004; Darkow, 2015; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Hecht et al., 1999; Holmemo \& Ingvaldsen, 2016; Johansen, 2012; Ouakouak et al., 2014; Tse et al., 2018; Wooldridge \& Floyd,
1990). The effects of employee role conflict in business, industry, and the military have been shown to impact negatively job performance, job satisfaction (Ahmed et al., 2014; Biddle, 1986; Conley et al., 1989; Fried et al., 1998; Jackson \& Schuler, 1985; Sakires et al., 2009), and institutional success (Celik, 2013; Kahn et al., 1964; Jackson \& Schuler, 1985), which contributes to high rates of job turnover (DiRenzo et al., 2017). This high turnover is mirrored in the position of academic chairperson (Carroll, 1991; Carroll \& Wolverton, 2004; Eisen, 1997; Gmelch \& Parkay, 1999; Lee, 1985) with role conflict being identified as a cited influencing factor for why chairpersons step down from their administrative positions to return to fulltime teaching (Gmelch, 2004).

In four-year teaching and research institutions, department chairpersons are normally recruited from among the faculty community (Carroll \& Wolverton, 2004; Gmelch \& Schuh, 2004). Studies suggest that the majority of faculty who chair departments do so for 2 to 6 years before stepping down from the position (Carroll, 1991; Carroll \& Wolverton 2004; Cassie et al., 2007; Eisen, 1997; Hecht et al., 1999; Lee, 1985; A. B. Smith \& Stewart, 1998). Rather than considering the position as a stable promotion to administration, "chairs frequently see themselves as scholars who, out of a sense of duty, temporarily accept responsibility for administrative tasks so that other professors can continue with their teaching and scholarly pursuits" (Gmelch, 1991, p. 45). Corresponding to the chairperson's desire for a limited term of service are the expectations of department faculty, who respond to strong administrative structures as a possible threat to their autonomy and collective power (Bowen \& Tobin, 2015; Donoghue, 2008; Ginsberg, 2011).

Complicating this tendency for faculty to view the department chairperson position as a temporary "poisoned chalice" (Goodall et al., 2017, p. 546) is the role chairpersons often play as
a faculty peer and friend, which can interfere with their administrative authority in the allocating of department resources, performance of faculty evaluations, and negotiation of interpersonal conflict with their department faculty (Gmelch, 2004; King, 1997, Tucker, 1981, 1993). While research suggests that maintaining collegiality has positive impact on academic leadership (Cameron, 2012; Cipriano \& Buller, 2013; Manning, 2018), motivations for collegiality are complex and the "chairperson's effectiveness may become compromised because they need to be highly collegial, otherwise it could be very difficult for them when they return to their faculty position" (Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016, p. 188).

Hecht et al. (1999) posited that short, rotational chairperson terms might heighten the chairperson's awareness of a fragile, temporary authority. In essence, temporary chairpersons "may be reluctant to tackle sensitive issues and reticent to engage in long-term activities. Their objective becomes not rocking the boat rather than leading the department through any significant change" (Hecht et al., 1999, p. 7). Exacerbating these potential social and political constraints on the chairperson's authority and effectiveness is the case that few chairpersons have had much management or leadership training (Carroll \& Wolverton 2004; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2011; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Potgieter et al., 2010).

While some academics have applauded temporary "faculty administrators, essentially working in their spare time" (Ginsberg, 2011, p. 24), as having the necessary leadership expertise to run a contemporary university, Gmelch and Buller (2015) lamented what they characterized as a persistent lack of awareness of the resources required to become an effective academic leader. Gmelch and Buller (2015) wrote,

Most American universities expect that it will take faculty members six or seven years to attain the level of expertise expected for them to receive tenure, with an additional five to
seven years required before they can be considered for promotion to the rank of full professor. Moreover, all that preparation comes only after the faculty member has already spent between three and ten years as a graduate student and postdoc. So if we assume that it takes ten to twenty years for a highly intelligent person to become an expert in an academic discipline, why do we assume that we can train academic leaders in a three-day workshop? (p. 8)

There is a large body of research and commentary on the experiences, behaviors, and needs of faculty who are new to the position of department chairperson (Chapel, 1993; Gabbe et al., 2008; Hecht et al., 1999; Olwell, 2007; Tucker, 1981, 1993; Wescott, 2000). However, there is a dearth of research on the chairperson with long-term administrative experience. Studies in business and industry suggest that turnover in general is costly and has negative effects on institutional success (Barrows, 1990; Gustafson, 2002; Hogan, 1992; Wasmuth \& Davis, 1983). Similar concerns in the academic environment over such a concern has resulted in a number of studies of faculty turnover (Barnes et al., 1998; Daly \& Dee, 2006; Johnsrud \& Rosser, 2002; Rahim et al., 2015; Rosser, 2004; Smart, 1990; Zhou \& Volkwein, 2004). In the case of the department chairperson, however, a 6-year attrition rate does not normally result in the direct loss of personnel, since chairpersons do not lose employment but instead resume a fulltime teaching load. Nonetheless, these shorter administrative terms are still a disruption in leadership. As leadership is a dimension of human experience that takes time to master (Birnbaum, 1992; Gardner, 1990; Gmelch, 2004; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2011; Kouzes \& Posner, 2012), it has been noted that in the higher education environment "a major disadvantage of the rapidly rotating chairmanship is the lack of continuity" (Adler, 1984, p. 49).

Yet there are department chairpersons in 4-year colleges and universities who perform their administrative roles for longer than 6 years, or who are in the position indefinitely (Adler, 1984; Carroll \& Wolverton, 2004; Cassie et al., 2007; Eisen, 1997; Welch, 1996). Their tenure in the position usually results through such mechanisms as joint agreement among department peers, the absence of institutional rules on chairperson term limits or term renewals, or direct appointment by upper administration (Carroll \& Wolverton, 2004). It is surprising that the longterm department chairperson has been ignored by scholars, especially in light of studies like Glueck and Thorp (1974), who reported that department faculty were more satisfied with chairpersons who had inhabited the role for 6 years or more. It is reasonable to suppose that these seasoned chairpersons, whose experiences have not been examined by the research community, may have unique information to impart concerning their experiences as department-level administrators in higher education.

In a survey of department chairs, program directors, and deans, Cassie et al. (2007) found that $65 \%$ of respondents indicated that it took them 1 to 3 years to master the skills needed for their leadership position (p. 124). In contrast, the same study revealed that $88 \%$ of the respondents who had been fulltime administrators for 15 years or longer held a different view of their knowledge acquisition. These respondents, when looking back on their careers, reported that it had taken them a minimum of 5 years, and in many cases longer, to become skilled at academic leadership (Cassie et al., 2007, p. 124). That the majority of the longer-term administrators in this study claimed that it took them longer to learn their jobs suggests that time in the position had afforded them greater self-awareness of their managerial expertise, which is supported by empirical investigations into the nature of expertise. Such studies suggest that it takes a person an average of 10 years of continuous practice to achieve domain expertise,
regardless of discipline (Anderson, 1982; Ericsson et al., 1993; Kaufman \& Kaufman, 2007; Matsuo \& Kusumi, 2002).

As colleges and universities evolved to become more bureaucratic and organizationally complex (Bok, 2003; Crow \& Dabars, 2015; Geiger, 2016; Selingo, 2015; Zumeta et al., 2012), higher education has also become "more dependent than ever on chairpersons possessing superb managerial skills-chairs who are well able to implement university policies and directives, and affect change in order to assist institutions reaching their objectives amidst all the internal and external challenges" (Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016, p. 186). The department chairperson occupies "one of the most complex, elusive, and intriguing positions, [in higher education, and is] the critical link between the administrative requirements of the university and the faculty values of the academic departments" (Gmelch \& Burns, 1993, p. 259). However, due to the organizational complexities of the contemporary college and university, and the societal and economic challenges facing higher education today, some researchers have claimed that the "effective functioning of higher education institutions may be in jeopardy if the role of the academic chairperson is not revised or reconceptualised [sic] in the near future" (Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016, p. 184). If Gmelch and Miskin (2011) were correct in asserting that "the time of 'amateur administration'-where professors play musical chairs, stepping occasionally into the role of department chair-is over" (p. 5), then examining how chairpersons with consistent, long-term administrative experience live with their role conflict may inform how faculty, administrators, and policy-makers prepare for current and future challenges in higher education.

## Statement of the Problem

Department chairpersons in higher education deal with a multiplicity of roles, situations, and stakeholders that position them between the sometimes complementary but often divergent
goals and perspectives of the academic department in which they serve, and the wider university concerns of campus administration. The frontline management position that chairpersons inhabit within their organizations engenders role conflict that can negatively affect their individual job performance and institutional success. Although studies exist on the role conflict of chairpersons in general, there has been no published study to date on how long-term department chairpersons in four-year institutions of higher learning experience organizational role conflict.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate, describe, and interpret how long-term chairpersons conceptualize, process, and negotiate their hybrid role as administrators and faculty members in higher education, and how they reconcile the work of their academic departments with broader institutional concerns. Further, although the position of department head is not identical to that of department chairperson in higher education, because the long-term department head also maintains a frontline manager role, consideration for people in this position was included. The experiences concerned were generally defined as working within universities or colleges with various stakeholders such as students, faculty members, administrators, staff, and external stakeholders.

## Research Questions

I designed this study to enable me to investigate, describe, and interpret the organizational role conflict experienced by faculty who serve as long-term department chairpersons and those who serve in similar positions, such as long-term department heads. The study was guided by the following three research questions that collectively inform an understanding of role conflict:

1. How do long-term department chairpersons or long-term department heads describe their organizational/professional identities?
2. How do long-term department chairpersons or long-term department heads experience and navigate their faculty and department manager roles and others' expectations of them?
3. How have long-term department chairpersons or long-term department heads made sense of their faculty and manager roles and others' expectations of them over time while in the department chairperson position?

In this study I adopted a qualitative research method because I intended to "use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, [for] the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 94). Specifically, I adopted a qualitative method called hermeneutic phenomenology to uncover how long-term department chairpersons experience the phenomenon of role conflict within their organizations. The adoption of a qualitative approach is well suited to the study of organizational role conflict (Biddle \& Thomas, 1966). Though serving different aims, both role theory and phenomenological investigation situate the individual within a historical and cultural context in order to capture that individual's experiences of a larger reality (Biddle, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). This association is intrinsic, since early phenomenologists and role theorists were heavily influenced by 18th and 19th century continental philosophers who had rejected the natural sciences as the only vehicle for comprehending natural phenomena. Both role theory and phenomenology employ methods that assign validity to personal experience in a way that contradicts positivist beliefs in objective reality (Lawlor, 2012).

## Significance of the Study

Investigating the lived experiences of faculty administrators who deal long-term with the organizational role conflict that is an integral part of their position can inform our understanding of a subgroup of academic managers who are largely ignored in the research literature. Such studies are needed, especially since it is the perceived negatives of the chairperson role that turn so many faculty away from accepting it. Because of the well-documented personal and professional toll that role conflict exerts on the chairperson, "those considering this position will come to realise that it is not always sensible to take up this role" (Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016, p. 200). Short-term rotations of the chairperson position among department faculty has been cited as contributing to "endless politicking, to continual uncertainty about policy, [and] to lack of organized planning" (Adler, 1984, p. 49).

Since department chairpersons with strong managerial and leadership skills are essential to the successful functioning and ongoing improvement of colleges and universities (Allen, 2003; Aziz et al., 2005; Bennett, 1998; Bowman, 2002; Brann, 1972; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Hecht et al., 1999; Leaming, 2007; Lucas, 2000; Tucker, 1981, 1993; Welch, 1996; Westmeyer, 1990), examining the role conflict of the long-term department chairperson may uncover new information on a group of academic administrators who provide continuity of leadership in higher education. In addition, although the position of academic department head is customarily seen as possessing more positional authority than that of department chairperson (Is There Any, 2014; Krause, 2006; Porter, 1961) this study includes consideration of the long-term department head's role conflict, since this position has not been studied, and because the department head also serves in the frontline manager position for an academic department (Emslie, 2013; Is There Any, 2014; Krause, 2006; Porter, 1961; Western Kentucky, 1989, 2013, 2020).

## Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of terms and concepts used in this study.
College or university. In this study the terms college and university refer to a 4-year, nonprofit institution of higher learning that has a physical presence, such as a campus, awards academic degrees in various academic or professional disciplines, and is accredited by an agency or agencies recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (n.d.) or the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.).

Consensus. Consensus describes both explicit and tacit agreement among members of a group concerning the expectations for the individual members of that group. As people in a social system form normative concepts of behavior and social position, people operating in that system "know what they should do, and all persons in the system can be counted on to support those norms with sanctions" (Biddle, 1986, p. 76).

Contingent position. A contingent position is defined by the American Association of University Professors as fulltime or part-time non-tenure-track faculty, postdocs, teaching assistants, lab assistants, and research assistants (AAUP, n.d., para. 1).

Department chairperson/Department head. A department chairperson and a department head is an academic working within one of the academic departments of a college or university, who acts as the designated representative of that department to campus administration and outside stakeholders, such as the community, parents, students, and funding organizations. This titled position requires the administration of department-level tasks that include resource allocation, mentorship of department colleagues, supervision and evaluation of support staff, facilities management, course scheduling, and sometimes the management of external grants, special programs, and projects. This work usually carries a reduced teaching load and may
include required continuous activity in scholarship and service. Normally, this position runs on a 12-month cycle with a set number of vacation days. Depending on the college or university, the department chairperson or department head may assume this leadership position by being hired in a national or internal search, promoted from within through department faculty consensus, promoted from within through a formal rotation scheme, or directly assigned to the position by a senior administrator (Krause, 2006; Porter, 1961; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981).

Frontline manager. A manager who works closest to the core business processes of an organization and who is positioned below middle management and executive management within the organization's hierarchy (DuBrin, 2009). In U.S. higher education, the academic frontline manager is the department chairperson and the department head (Mintzberg, 1979, 1998).

Interrole conflict. In interrole conflict "an individual perceives that others hold different expectations for him as the incumbent of two or more positions" (Gross et al., 1958, p. 249).

Intrarole conflict. An individual experiences intrarole conflict when "he perceives that others hold different expectations for him as the incumbent of a single position" (Gross et al., 1958, pp. 248-249).

Long-term chairperson/Long-term department head. In one of the few studies noting term lengths for department chairpersons, Carroll and Wolverton (2004) reported that the majority of chairpersons step down from administrative work after 6 consecutive years or less; therefore, the long-term chairperson and long-term department head are defined in this study as a chairperson or department head with 6 or more consecutive years in the position.

Position. Position, synonymous with status, is "the location of an actor or class of actors in a system of social relationships" (Gross et al., 1958, p. 48).

Role. A role is "the sum total of the culture patterns associated with a particular status. It thus includes the attitudes, values, and behavior ascribed by the society to any and all persons occupying the status" (Linton, 1945, p. 77).

Role ambiguity. Role ambiguity is "a condition in which expectations are incomplete or insufficient to guide behavior" (Biddle, 1986, p. 83).

Role conflict. Role conflict is "any situation in which the incumbent of a position perceives that he [sic] is confronted with incompatible expectations" (Biddle, 1979, p. 288).

Role conformity. For the individual "conformity connotes compliance to some pattern of behavior that is based on the expectations of other people" related to a specific role (Biddle, 1986, p. 78).

Role expectations. Role expectations are "position-specific norms that identify the attitudes, behaviors, and cognitions required and anticipated for a role occupant" (Hardy \& Conway, 1988, p. 165).

Role identity. Role identity is "the individual's interpretation of role expectations" (Hardy \& Conway, 1988, p. 165).

Role overload. Role overload is "having too many role demands and too little time and resources to fulfill them" (Coverman, 1989, p. 967).

Role set. A role set is "the constellation of relationships with role partners of a particular position" (Merton, 1957, p. 369).

Role strain. Role strain is "an outcome of role overload" (Creary \& Gordon, 2016, p. 1) which is "a subjective state of emotional arousal in response to external conditions of social stress (Hardy \& Conway, 1988, p. 165) experienced within a specific role.

Role stress. Role stress is "a social structural condition in which role obligations are vague, irritating, difficult, conflicting, or impossible to meet. Role stress is a characteristic of the social system, not a person in the system" (Hardy \& Conway, 1988, p. 165).

Role taking. Role taking is the ability to understand the cognitive and affective dimensions of another person's point of view, regardless of one's own positive or negative feelings towards that other person (Coutu, 1951; Johnson, 1975; Mead 1934/1962).

STEM. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
Social system. A social system, or a human system, is a predictable series of interrelationships between people with shared values, shared goals, and/or geographical proximity (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Birnbaum, 1988; Linton, 1936, 1945; Merton, 1957).

Status. Status, synonymous with position, is "the location of an actor or class of actors in a system of social relationships" (Gross et al., 1958, p. 48).

## Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the work of mid to late 20th-century researchers on the organizational role conflict of department chairpersons in higher education. I related the chairperson's organizational role conflict to the role conflict experienced by middle managers and frontline managers in business and industry, and I suggested the similarity between the positions in serving as institutional linchpins linking together the different subgroups of top management and core employees. I then presented claims made in the literature concerning the unattractiveness of the chairperson position to an incumbent because of its potential to tax peer relationships in exercising authority, interfere with the incumbent's research and teaching, challenge the incumbent's identity as a scholar, and place the incumbent in situations of organizational role conflict between campus administration and department faculty.

In reviewing the importance of the chairperson's place within higher education, I explained claims made by scholars on the damaging consequences of ineffectual departmentlevel management and the disruption in continuity of leadership should the chairperson position in higher education continue to be viewed as a temporary burden and onerous service commitment. I then introduced the few studies that have dealt with term lengths for department chairpersons, and I proposed faculty serving a length of term equal to 6 consecutive years or more as a reasonable measurement for what I define as the long-term department chairperson. I noted the absence of studies on how long-term chairpersons experience organizational role conflict as a gap in the literature suitable for investigation, and I presented hermeneutic phenomenology as an appropriate methodology for exploring the three research questions I listed in this chapter. I presented organizational role theory as my theoretical framework and concluded the chapter with definitions predominantly centering on terms specific to role theory. Lastly, since the department head occupies a frontline manager position similar to that of department chairperson, I stated that consideration of the role conflict experienced by the long-term department head is included in this study.

## CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizations, such as colleges and universities, formalize people's behavior by coordinating activities and standardizing processes to bring about institutional outcomes (Birnbaum, 1988; Bjork, 1975; Bobbitt \& Behling, 1981; Hofmann \& Jones, 2005; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Manning, 2018; Mintzberg, 1979; Pugh et al., 1968). "No matter what the means of formalization," Mintzberg (1979) wrote, "by job, workflow, or rules-the effect on the person doing the work is the same: his behavior is regulated" (p. 82). In organizational theory, formalization becomes embedded in variant "levels of graded authority" (Weber, 1902/1946, p. 197) that rely on organizational structure to exist (Birnbaum, 1988; Blau \& Scott, 1962/2003; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979; Weber, 1902/1942; Weick, 1976). Through formalization, a key to understanding an individual's behavior within an organization as it relates to division of labor, professional identity, and locus of authority is to examine the organization in which that individual works (Birnbaum, 1988; Bolman \& Deal, 2017; Bolman \& Gallos, 2011; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Manning, 2018; Mintzberg 1979).

Because my purpose was to examine the organizational role conflict of the long-term department chairperson and because this type of conflict involves aspects of locus of authority (Baldridge, 1971; Bowen \& Tobin, 2015), formalized divisions of labor (Birnbaum, 1988; Mintzberg 1979), and professional culture and identity (Birnbaum, 1988, 1992; Manning, 2018;

Mintzberg, 1979), I begin this review of the literature with two aspects of organizational theory: structure and culture. Organizational structure is "the sum total of ways in which it [the organization] divides its labor into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination among them" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 2). Organizational culture is "the shared rules governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organization, and the means whereby they are shaped and expressed" (Kunda, 2006, p. 8). Geertz (1973) provided a useful comparison when he wrote that "culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions; social structure is the form which action takes, the actually existing network of social relations" (p. 145).

Since the data collected in this study were interpreted through the language of organizational role theory, I include in this literature review a brief overview of role theory development by highlighting select milestones in role theory history in the 20th century. In doing so, certain aspects of role theory are detailed to illustrate how organizational role theory in particular fits within the larger landscape of the various sociological and psychosocial models that are part of this overarching paradigm. How organizational role theory relates to division of labor, professional identity (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Gross et al., 1958; Kahn et al., 1964; Katz \& Kahn, 1978), and locus of authority (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Biddle, 1986; Gross et al., 1958; Kahn et al., 1964) are addressed in order to illustrate how role theory corresponds to organizational theory and to demonstrate that organizational role theory is a suitable model for interpreting the dynamics of role conflict as experienced by the department chairperson (Carroll \& Gmelch, 1994; Kahn et al., 1964; Katz \& Kahn, 1978). Moreover, as role conflict is a phenomenon studied in many areas of human experience (Biddle, 1986; Elloy \& Smith, 2003; Gross et al., 1958; S. T. Kerr, 1978), such as within the family (Githaiga, 2017; Gross et al., 1958; Kuo et al.,

2018; Lawton et al., 2018) and in therapeutic settings (Goisman, 1988; Toubia, 2014;
Zamanzadeh et al., 2017), I cite basic distinctions between the role theory perspective used outside of organizational structures and the organizational role theory perspective I employed in this study in order to establish clarity of theoretical focus. I conclude this chapter with a review of studies from the 1970s and 1980s that identified the duties and roles of the department chairperson and later studies that incorporated role theory to examine chairperson role conflict.

## Organizational Structure of Higher Education

The literature of organizational theory as it relates to structure is large, varied, and contradictory (Bobbitt \& Behling, 1981; Peterson, 2007). Such diversity may exist, in part, because organizational theorists come from different disciplines, such as political science, sociology, management, education, and psychology, each with their own disciplinary approaches, assumptions, and traditions (Manning, 2018; Mahoney \& Thelen, 2009). In recent decades this diversity of research may also be influenced by the postpositivist conviction that the human experience is "filled with ambiguity and contradiction" (Kezar et al., 2006, p. 26), making the description of human systems difficult to reduce into discrete, manageable forms.

As far back as 1963, Cyert and March understood the complexity of examining and describing human organizations when they wrote that "the major dilemma in organizational theory has been putting into the theory all features of organizations we think are relevant and thereby making the theory unmanageable, or pruning the model down to a single system, thereby making it unrealistic" (p. 136). Although the university as an organization includes many types of workers in addition to faculty and administration, such as support staff, research on department chairpersons' role conflict highlights the tension between the chairperson's hybrid roles as an administrator and faculty member. While conceding to the imperative of ensuring
relevancy, Cyert and March's (1963) caution of avoiding unmanageability should be heeded. For this reason, analyses of the select organizational models presented here focuses primarily on the positions and interrelationships of the faculty, the administration, and the chairpersons who are dispersed between these two groups. Since the body of research on organizational structure as it relates to the university environment is extensive (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Manning, 2018), two different models, one linear and one nonlinear, are presented here to represent the diversity of theoretical interpretations that exist in the literature.

## Mintzberg's Linear Structure

Mintzberg (1979) described organizational structure as linear in nature, as illustrated by a basic model. He asserted that all organizations are comprised of five basic parts (Figure 1). At the top of the hierarchy is the strategic apex, peopled by top management. At the bottom is the operating core, made up of people who perform the basic work of the institution. Positioned between these two polarities is the middle line, made up of a pool of people with varying levels of administrative authority. Outside of these three levels are two further reinforcing parts. To the right is the support staff, made up of people whose work supports that of the operating core. To the left is the technostructure, made up of people who standardize working processes for the organization.

## Figure 1

The Five Parts of an Organization


From The Structuring of Organizations: A Synthesis of the Research (p. 20), by H. Mintzberg, 1979, Prentice-Hall. Copyright 1979 by Pearson Education, Inc. Used with permission.

Mintzberg's (1979) labels for the five parts describes the division of labor, while the shape of his model evokes locus of authority. As seen in Figure 1, the strategic apex is positioned highest and is small, indicating a cohort of fewer people with the greatest individual authority. These workers are responsible for ensuring that the organization fulfills its mission by devising a vision for the future and shepherding strategies to drive institutional success. Such people also serve as institutional spokespersons. Opposite the strategic apex, the operating core is made up of relatively more people who have less individual authority than those occupying the strategic apex. Less individual authority, however, does not necessarily indicate lesser importance.

Because the operating core performs the basic work of the organization, it is the foundation upon which the organization rests. By way of example, while the operating core of factory workers has less individual authority than the factory owner; the factory will not be able to fulfill its mission of creating products without its operating core. Hence, the operating core of an organization may have collective authority by declaring a strike. As illustrated in Figure 1, the support staff and the technostructure, though critical to the organization, are represented by Mintzberg as separate parts attached along a vertical chain of command that is the strategic apex, middle line, and operating core.

Embedded in the center of this hierarchy, the middle line is made up of people who serve as proxies of central administration in managing the people of the operating core. In many organizations, the size and complexity of the middle line is dictated by the size of the organization and the levels of bureaucracy. A small organization might only need one person positioned in the middle line. The larger and more bureaucratic the organization, however, the greater the need for people in the middle line to provide supervision of a larger infrastructure. Mintzberg (1979) also noted that in some organizations, the middle line can sometimes branch off, such as when a middle manager reports to more than one supervisor within the organization.

As illustrated in the basic model (Figure 1) people inhabiting the middle line become smaller in number and grow greater in authority the closer they are organizationally positioned to the strategic apex. Conversely, people in the middle line who fall lower down the chain of command are in closer contact with the operating core. A manager's placement along the vertical axis will determine that manager's level of authority. By way of example, if a manager is placed high up on the chain of command, the division of labor for that person can take on some elements of the strategic apex. Mintzberg (1979) wrote,

In general, the middle line manager performs all the managerial roles of a chief executive, but in the context of managing his own unit (Mintzberg, 1973a). He must serve as a figurehead for his own unit and lead its members; develop a network of liaison contacts; monitor the environment and his unit's activities and transmit some of the information he receives into his own unit, up the hierarchy, and outside the chain of command; allocate resources within his unit; negotiate with outsiders; initiate strategic change; and handle exceptions and conflicts. (p. 29)

If a middle line position is functioning lower down the vertical chain of command, the work for that manager becomes more structured and procedural and takes on elements of the operating core. In this lower middle line position, a manager makes decisions for the workers that are "more frequent, of shorter duration, and less elastic, ambiguous, and abstract" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 29) when compared to a manager whose work comes closer into contact with the strategic apex. However, whether occupying a higher or lower ranking position, people in the middle line "perform a number of tasks in the flow of direct supervision above and below them" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 28). Because of this centrality, the middle line holds the organization together by binding the strategic apex to the operating core. The more vertical the chain of command (i.e., the greater number of levels within the middle line), the farther away the operating core is from the strategic apex. This is illustrated by the reality of a worker on an assembly line having never met the company president.

Having described the five parts of an organization, Mintzberg (1979) modified his basic model (Figure 1) to differentiate between different types of structural configurations. As in the basic model, these modified configurations illustrate division of labor and locus of authority. Mintzberg (1979) identified school systems, accounting firms, hospitals, professional practices,
and universities as belonging to what he termed the professional bureaucracy type of structure (p. 314). In Figure 2, Mintzberg's professional bureaucracy is illustrated as a university where each of the five parts are labeled with exemplary job titles and functional areas. Here (Figure 2) the strategic apex is populated by the board of trustees and top administrative positions. Below these are associate and assistant deans. Under this level of authority are people in the middle line who occupy the first rung of the academic administrative ladder, the department chairpersons. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the operating core, comprised of the faculty. As in Mintzberg's basic model, this configuration includes a technostructure that standardizes institutional processes, illustrated in Figure 2 on the left. A host of support services that assist the operating core are seen in Figure 2 on the right.

Figure 2
The Professional Bureaucracy


Adapted from The Structuring of Organizations: A Synthesis of the Research (p. 355), by H. Mintzberg, 1979, Prentice-Hall. Copyright 1979 by Pearson Education, Inc. Adapted with permission.

Since Mintzberg (1979) did not incorporate job titles into his model of a professional bureaucracy, the job titles and functional areas in Figure 2 offer one example of how positions fall along the academic chain of command. It is critical to note that various cohorts within the organization can perceive any individual's placement within this hierarchy differently, because institutional culture and individual perspective alter perceptions of authority and professional identity (Abu-Alruz \& Khasawneh, 2013; Birnbaum, 1988; Bowen \& Tobin, 2015; Manning, 2018; Morgan, 2006; Weerts et al., 1985). By way of example, at some universities a department chairperson may consider herself an administrator who is solidly in the middle line, while faculty in her department see her as being a faculty peer in the operating core (Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004). As Mintzberg (1998) explained, managing within the professional bureaucracy means "not being in absolute control of others nor being completely powerless, but functioning somewhere in between" (p. 143). The finer distinctions between these variations notwithstanding, it is important to note that the department chairperson occupies a space within the chain of command between the strategic apex and the operating core and, like all middle line positions, serves as a strategic and informational conduit between these two constituents (Mintzberg, 1998).

Mintzberg (1979) altered the shape of his basic model to illustrate how the five parts of the professional bureaucracy work together in this type of organization. Here, the middle line is shortened (Figure 2), which gives people in the operating core closer access to people in the strategic apex. A popular metaphor for managing in a professional bureaucracy is that it is like
"herding cats" (Mintzberg, 1998, p. 147). In the academic environment, this metaphor describes an administration that performs the official function of running the institution while sharing power with faculty members who possess strong professional identities (Mintzberg, 1998). Certainly, consensus can be sought informally. However, "what frequently emerges in the professional bureaucracy," Mintzberg (1979) noted, "are parallel administrative hierarchies, one democratic and bottom up for the professionals, and a second machine bureaucratic and top down for the support staff" (p. 360). The bottom-up hierarchy of the university is its faculty governance structure, which is an established feature of the modern university (Duryea, 1972/2010; Gerber, 2014; Ginsberg, 2011; Manning, 2018; Thelin, 2004).

In the professional bureaucracy, Mintzberg (1979) oriented the technostructure vertically to illustrate how this part of the organizational structure standardizes process, such as when a comptroller handles financial accounting for the entire organization. However, the support staff part of the model is broadened along the horizontal to illustrate its relationship to the operating core. In the university model (Figure 2) the faculty, through their teaching and research, do the basic work of the organization. As in the basic model, the professional bureaucracy support staff exist to reinforce the work of the operating core. Although it could be argued that some of the functional areas illustrated in Figure 2 are more student centered, such as dining services and residential life, because these areas ultimately support the teaching mission of the university, they support the work of the operating core.

Thus, supported by a large and complex lattice of support services while performing the traditional work of the university, faculty understand that their work is mission critical and expect a strong collective voice in the administrative decisions that affect their working environment (Bowen \& Tobin, 2015; Manning, 2018; Mintzberg, 1979). Shared labor and
authority also encourages a blurring of identities, as faculty engage in administrative functions through their service on governance and ad hoc committees, while fulltime administrators sometimes teach and must be "certified members of the profession" (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 358) to maintain credibility with the faculty. Within these institutional channels, the department chairperson must navigate through an organizational power structure of competing hierarchies in the academic chain of command while balancing their own hybrid duties and identities as administrator and professor (Bowen \& Tobin, 2015; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Tucker, 1981, 1993).

## Birnbaum's Nonlinear Structure

Unlike Mintzberg (1979), Birnbaum (1988) constructed nonlinear structural models to illustrate formalization in relation to locus of authority, division of labor, and institutional perspective. In one of these models, Birnbaum paid particular attention to the chairperson's place within the university infrastructure. In Figure 3, the university proper is represented as a large outer circle. This circle distinguishes the university from the rest of the environment, such as the town in which the university is located. Within this circle are two subsystems. The circle on the left is what Birnbaum called the technical subsystem, made up of the faculty and components that support faculty work, such as academic freedom policies and research laboratories. The circle on the right is the administrative subsystem, made up of administrators and administrative elements, such as deans and budgets.

## Figure 3

Model of a School System


From How Colleges Work: The Cybernetics of Academic Organization and Leadership (p. 32), by R. Birnbaum, 1988, Jossey-Bass. Copyright 1988 by John Wiley and Sons. Used with permission.

As seen in Figure 3, Birnbaum (1988) created a Venn diagram of these two subsystems to indicate that the department chairperson belongs simultaneously to the technical subsystem and the administrative subsystem because of division of labor, as chairpersons do both faculty related and administrative work. Locus of authority is evoked, as the chairperson shares official membership in each of these subsystems. To explain how the technical and administrative subsystems relate to each other, Birnbaum used an established construct of organizational theory originally developed by Weick (1976), called loose and tight coupling.

Weick (1976) decried the unsuitability of superimposing bidirectional, top-down or bottom-up hierarchies upon the educational environment when he noted, Imagine that you're either the referee, coach, player or spectator at an unconventional soccer match: the field for the game is round; there are several goals scattered haphazardly around the circular field; people can enter and leave the game whenever they want to; they can throw balls in whenever they want; they can say "that's my goal" whenever they want to, as many times as they want to, and for as many goals as they want to; the entire game takes place on a sloped field; and the game is played as if it makes sense (March, 1975, personal communication). If you now substitute in that example principals for referees, teachers for coaches, students for players, parents for spectators and schooling for soccer, you have an equally unconventional depiction of school organizations. The beauty of this depiction is that it captures a different set of realities within educational organizations than are caught when these same organizations are viewed through the tenets of bureaucratic theory. (p. 1)

Weick (1976) maintained that to understand the loose, unrestricted quality of the educational structure is to understand its essence. He cautioned against attempts to change the inherent, nonlinear structure of teaching institutions and maintained that a penchant for "rationalized, tidy, efficient, coordinated structures has blinded many practitioners as well as researchers to some of the attractive and unexpected properties" (Weick, 1976, p. 1) of the educational environment. Birnbaum (1988) echoed this view when he asserted that loose coupling "can be considered not as evidence of organizational pathology or administrative failure" ( p .41 ) but rather as an essential characteristic of the university environment.

Building upon Glassman's (1973) constructs of loose coupling, Weick (1976) developed the concept of loose and tight coupling to describe organizational structure specific to the educational environment. Subsystems that are loosely coupled share "few variables or weak variables" (p.3) such as a lack of agreement on division of labor or locus of authority, institutional agenda, internal policies, or priorities related to shared agenda. Two subsystems with identical rules and procedures might also be loosely coupled if those protocols are strictly enforced in one subsystem but not in the other (Weick, 1976). Because of their relative independence from each other, loosely coupled subsystems within an organization can leave participants room to construct creative responses to emergent conditions. However, such coupling can also engender a deficiency in the standardization of institutional processes that allows for swift and efficient institution-wide change (Birnbaum, 1988; Bowen \& Tobin, 2015; Weick, 1976). Tight coupling, as the name suggests, describes subsystems that operate with strongly shared variables. Two subsystems that are in agreement on locus of authority, for example, can be defined as tightly coupled. This can be illustrated by an administrator and a subsystem sharing the same locus of authority. If the subsystem recognizes the administrator's authority, that administrator can often assume that his directives will be carried out unchallenged by that subsystem (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 39).

Both Birnbaum (1988) and Weick (1976) recognized that at any given time there can be multiple subsystems in a university structure that are either loosely or tightly coupled. By way of example, a college dean may be loosely coupled with an academic department in her college but tightly coupled with a particular graduate program. Although the academic department and the graduate program include many of the same faculty members, the department is one subsystem, while the graduate program is another. Moreover, Birnbaum and Weick maintained that loose
and tight coupling can be temporally situated, such as when two subsystems were loosely coupled last year but tightly coupled this year. This is why, as Weick (1976) noted, "it should come as no surprise that administrators are baffled and angered when things never happen the way they were supposed to" (p. 4). Tight and loose coupling between overlapping subsystems confounds formalization and complicates cause and effect analyses of institutional behavior and effectiveness.

If an administrator has the expectation that all parts of the organization should be tightly coupled, or to use Mintzberg's (1979) definition, follow a linear, top-down hierarchy, then in Weick (1976) and Birnbaum's (1988) view, such administrators ignore the reality of loose coupling and grossly oversimplify their own working environment. Birnbaum (1988) explained, Administrators with linear perspectives are likely to emphasize making rational decisions: administrators with nonlinear perspectives are likely to be concerned with making sense. Linear administrators think they know how the systems works and how to change it: nonlinear administrators are more modest in their assumptions and their expectations. (p. 55)

Birnbaum's (1988) decision to highlight two specific subsystems in Figure 3 demonstrates his reliance on Weick (1976) who noted that "there is no shortage of potential coupling elements [subsystems], but neither is the population infinite. At the outset the two most commonly discussed coupling mechanisms are the technical core of the organization [faculty] and the authority of office [administration]" (p. 4). Birnbaum claimed that in some colleges, and at any given time, an academic department subsystem and administrative subsystem may only have one variable in common, the department chairperson. Following Weick's example, Birnbaum (1988) maintained that loose coupling to one subsystem often results in tighter
coupling to another in that "the chair can be completely responsive to either the dean's demands or the faculty's demands but not to both" (p. 39).

As illustrated by their models, both Mintzberg (1979) and Birnbaum (1988) placed the department chairperson inside structures with competing divisions of labor and blurred locus of authority. Unlike Mintzberg's top-down professional bureaucracy (Figure 2), Birnbaum positioned the chairperson within a fluid area of separate, overlapping subsystems (Figure 3). Although both Mintzberg and Birnbaum successfully made the case for the existence of competing roles and inconsistent formalization processes for mid-level or frontline managers, a thorough examination of the chairpersons' organizational role conflict should include consideration of the cultural and historical contexts of their role conflict in the workplace.

## Historical Roots of Academic Culture

Social scientists study organizational culture to examine employees' perspectives and deeply held beliefs (Geertz, 1973; Gumport, 2007; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Kunda, 2006; Morgan, 2006). The definition of organizational culture adopted in this study, which is borrowed from the management sciences, is "a collection of fundamental values and attitudes common to members of a group, and which set the behavioral standards or norms for all [group] members" (A. C. Smith et al., 2012, p. 7). All organizations are "mini-societies" (Morgan, 2006, p. 125) in which people form parts of their identities (Edwards, 2005; Mael \& Ashforth, 1992; van Knippenberg \& Sleebos, 2006; van Manen, 2015) based on "prototypical or group-defining characteristics that individuals either assign themselves or are assigned by others" (Gizir, 2014, p. 1311). Although people working at various colleges and universities can define themselves based on their organization's specific "depictions of institutional character" (Manning, 2018, p. 90), the shared culture of higher education in the United States is distinguishable from that of other types of
working environments, making it feasible to examine a culture that is uniquely academic (Birnbaum, 1988, 2000; Bolman \& Gallos, 2011; M. D. Cohen \& March, 2000; Manning, 2018; Patterson, 2001; Peterson, 2007; Rowland, 2002).

As with all organizations, higher education is comprised of subcultures (Birnbaum, 1988; Bolman \& Gallos, 2011; Morgan, 2006) where formalized division of labor and institutionalized locus of authority defines membership in a particular group or groups (Birnbaum, 1988; Mintzberg, 1979, 1998; Weber, 1922/1952; Weick, 1976). For the department chairperson, these groups are defined by organizational and professional characteristics such as department or college, program, faculty rank, or administrative status (Birnbaum, 1988; Gumport, 2007; Morgan, 2006). However, subcultures in organizations are also defined by personal and social characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, age, shared interests, or political affiliation (Gherardi, 1995; Manning, 2018; Rockquemore \& Laszloffy, 2008). All employees, including department chairpersons, live within ever-evolving multiplicities of subcultures situated both inside and outside of the workplace (Birnbaum, 1988; Gerber, 2014; Gumport, 2007; Morgan, 2006 Rockquemore \& Laszloffy, 2008).

While people may consciously identify with a particular subculture, they do not necessarily note the cultural biases that affect their thinking (Birnbaum, 1988; Manning, 2018). Unless challenged by outside forces, such as another cultural perspective, one's own cultural perspective is ambient, inconspicuous, and taken for granted. In describing the effects of culture on the self-perception of bias, Morgan (2006) noted that,
the last thing a fish is likely to discover is the water it is swimming in. The water is so fundamental to the fish's way of life that it is not seen or questioned. The organizational world is full of similar examples. (p. 209)

In addition to unchecked biases, individuals will protect the status of the cultures and subcultures to which they belong in order to maintain membership in that group as "a source of positive identity" (Edwards, 2005, p. 211). Moreover, out of a sense of genuine duty, a desire for personal gain, or a defense against subjugation or inconsequentiality individuals will consciously or unthinkingly support organizational and social practices that offer their subcultures social advantage and political power (Manning, 2018; Mintzberg, 1979; Morgan, 2006).

By organizational arrangement, the department chairperson nominally belongs to at least two subcultural groups: the faculty and the administration (Allen, 2003; Birnbaum, 1988; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Hecht et al., 1999; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993). In examining organizational role conflict, Katz and Kahn (1978) noted that organizational roles "become more complex when they require the focal person [individual] to be simultaneously involved in two or more subsystems, since each is likely to have its own priorities and, to some degree, its own subculture" (p. 198). While recognizing that any person, including a department chairperson, may simultaneously belong to many subcultures (Birnbaum; 1988; Morgan, 2006), I limit this literature review to the faculty and administration subcultures, since conflict between these two groups is consistently cited as the greatest source of organizational role conflict for department chairpersons (Berdrow, 2010; Brawer et al., 2006; Buckholdt \& Miller, 2009; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Hancock, 2007; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Riley \& Russell, 2013; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993; Wolverton et al., 1999). Over 300 years of documented history presents examples of positive, cooperative collaboration between many subcultures within higher education in the United States (Altbach et al., 2011; Bolman \& Gallos, 2011; Bowen \& Tobin, 2015; Rudolph, 1962/1990; Thelin, 2004). However, since this study focuses on organizational role conflict, this review specifically targets areas of discord between the faculty and the administration.

Manning (2018) provided a useful description of the faculty and administration subcultures and the dynamic relationship that exists between them when she wrote, "Nowhere is the simultaneous existence of several organizational perspectives within a single institution more apparent than at the intersection of the faculty and administration. Faculty adhere predominantly to a collegial model while administrators typically operate as a bureaucracy" (p. 335). This culture clash between the collegial and the bureaucratic subcultures has been often cited as a source of conflict in higher education (Baldridge, 1971; Birnbaum, 1988, 2000; Bowen \& Tobin, 2015; Crookston, 2012; Gerber, 2014; Manning, 2018; Sharma, 1969). However, because the position of department chairperson organizationally resides "at the intersection of the faculty and administration" (Manning, 2018, p. 335), the differences between the goals and expectations of the collegium and the bureaucracy are particularly stressful for those in this position (Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993). Understanding the potential for discord between these two subcultures requires a brief historical review of how each group views its purpose in defining and contributing to the goals of the organization and how this relates to beliefs on professional identity, division of labor, and locus of authority within the organization.

## Development of Academic Departments

To understand contemporary faculty culture as it relates to the department chairperson's organizational role conflict, it is helpful to consider how the organizational structure of higher education evolved along disciplinary lines. The academic department of today emerged from antebellum, multidisciplinary colleges that initially focused on a narrow range of related disciplines (Rudolph, 1962/1990; Thelin, 2004). Before the mid to late 19th century, institutions of higher learning in the United States were organizationally basic. Typically, a cohort of male
instructors formed a single faculty unit supervised directly by one president and indirectly by a board of trustees or donors (Rudolph, 1962/1990; Thelin, 2004; Veysey, 1965). However, with the rise of industrialization throughout the 19th century, colleges and universities steadily became larger to meet the demands of growing trends in mass education (Rudolph, 1962/1990; Westmeyer, 1990). These developments engendered specialization in the division of labor that influenced the organizational structure of higher education. The collegium of a single, collegewide teaching unit working closely with one president evolved into a collegium of faculty working within separated, disciplinary-focused departments (Hecht et al., 1999; Rudolph, 1962/1990; Thelin, 2004; Veysey, 1965; Westmeyer, 1990). In tracing the rise of the academic department, Rudolph (1962/1990) noted that a larger group of faculty were required to teach a growing number of students and that a larger organization encouraged departmentalization. Rudolph (1962/1990) also noted that, departmentalization [was] a symbolic statement of the disunity of knowledge which was never made by the old colleges. Then [prior to the late 19th century] a professor contained within himself the knowledge and the interests necessary to sustain him as a teacher of several subjects. Then an untrained professor like John Bascom at Williams [College] could teach rhetoric, write books on aesthetics and political economy, and introduce courses in English literature and sociology. But now [early 20th century] the old unity was gone; the avid search for scientific truth was bringing forth great new contributions to knowledge, and specialization was leading to the splintering of subject areas. (p. 399)

The faculty, by enacting the basic teaching mission of the college and university, had always been the operating core, as defined by Mintzberg (1979). However, "By the turn of the
[19th] century," Duryea (1972/2010) wrote, "departments and professional schools had become the basic units for academic affairs. The academic structure of the university coinciding with the structure of knowledge" (p. 128). In this way the academic department became the organizational home of the faculty and the "locus of power" (A. M. Cohen \& Kisker, 2010, p. 166) for designing and delivering the curriculum, determining degree requirements, hiring and promoting faculty, and vying with other academic departments for institutional resources (Clark, 1987; A. M. Cohen \& Kisker, 2010; Gerber, 2014; Rudolph, 1962/1990; Thelin, 2004; Veysey, 1965; Westmeyer, 1990).

Also, during the late 19th century, college and university faculty became active members in newly formed, disciplinary-focused associations that managed scholarly journals and conferences, published reports, and created professional standards set by association membership. These associations provided the faculty a locus of scholarly identity and disciplinary-focused authority not controlled by college and university presidents (Clark, 1987; Gumport, 2007; Rudolph, 1962/1990; Thelin, 2004). Regional and national associations helped to encourage the development of a faculty subculture within higher education that was emphatically distinct from that of central administration (Clark, 1987; A. M. Cohen \& Kisker, 2010; Thelin, 2004). Although focused on their disciplines, faculty also sought involvement in institution-wide affairs through faculty governance (Gerber, 2014). Faculty identity, faculty organizational culture, and the organizational structure of higher education evolved concurrently (Birnbaum, 1988; Clark, 1987; Veysey, 1965) to the point that the academic department became the place "where the imperatives of the discipline and the institution converge" (Clark, 1987, p. 64).

## Administrative Growth and Complexity

Coinciding with the "splintering of the subject areas" (Rudolph, 1962/1990, p. 399) into academic departments, the growth of higher education in the mid to late 19th century also affected the office of the president in ways that helped to shape the subculture of the bureaucracy. Beginning in the early 19th century, more administrative positions were required to assist the president in running increasingly larger institutions. In response to trends in mass education, what had once been a one-person job now required a fulltime academic dean, university librarian, dean of students, and registrar (Hecht et al., 1999; Rudolph, 1962/1990; Thelin, 2004; Veysey, 1965; Westmeyer, 1990). New administrative positions, in turn, afforded the president more time to pursue philanthropy while interacting with the "political and industrial world as well as to move in academic circles" (Thelin, 2004, p. 127). This early administrative growth contributed to increased specialization in the division of labor, as administrative growth narrowed the organizational hierarchy, which put more distance between central administration and the faculty (Clark, 1987; A. M. Cohen \& Kisker, 2010; Thelin, 2004).

The strategic apex, technostructure, and support staff (Mintzberg, 1979) segments of the institution continued to grow throughout the 20th century in response to the need for administrative oversight of "increased regulation and external micromanagement" (Zemsky, 1990, p. 3) by state agencies, federal regulation, and boards of trustees. This growth included associate deans and vice presidents, as well as specialized administrative staff working yearround to perform such functions as the supervision of residence halls, management of computer systems and libraries, maintenance of the facilities and grounds, and management of investments and revenue (Hecht et al., 1999; Rudolph, 1962/1990; Thelin, 2004; Veysey, 1965; Westmeyer, 1990; Zemsky, 1990). Added to the responsibility of managing in increasingly complex
environments, administrators in the mid to late 20th century had to deal with shrinking state funding that had once provided a stable financial cushion upon which to plan short, and longterm institutional goals (Zemsky, 1990).

Although many administrators were fulltime faculty earlier in their careers, their work no longer centered on teaching and research, but rather on institutional concerns such as complying with state and federal regulations, controlling for spiraling employee health insurance, fundraising, promoting public relations, and competing for students in an increasingly competitive educational marketplace (A. M. Cohen \& Kisker, 2010; Garrett \& Poock, 2011; Hiltonsmith, 2015; Thelin, 2004; Zemsky, 1990). Meanwhile, while the academic department became the organizational seat of faculty, it also became a focus of attention away from many institution-wide concerns (A. M. Cohen \& Kisker, 2010). Gerber (2014) noted that "as demands on faculty to demonstrate research productivity and keep up with the latest instructional technologies have increased, many faculty members have come to regard involvement in governance activities as an unwelcome burden" (p. 8).

## Collegium Subculture

As the people responsible for fulfilling the teaching and research missions of the institution, faculty belong to the subculture of the collegium. Descriptions of the collegium are mixed, with characterizations ranging from a cohort of responsible scholars disposed to collaborative decision making (Baldridge et al., 1978; Gerber, 2014; Manning, 2018; Rudolph, 1962/1990) to an "intellectual oligarchy" (C. Kerr, 1963/2001, p. 31). In its idealized form, Birnbaum (1988) described membership in the collegium as, the right to participate in institutional affairs, membership in a "congenial and sympathetic company of scholars in which friendships, good-conversation, and mutual
aid can flourish," and the equal worth of knowledge in various fields that precludes preferential treatment of faculty in different disciplines (p. 55). Sanders (1973), in like vein, identified collegiately as "marked by a sense of mutual respect for the opinions of others, by agreement about the canons of good scholarship, and by a willingness to be judged by one's peers" (p. 65). (p. 87)

An important mechanism for the collegium's participation in institutional affairs is the faculty senate, a governing body of elected faculty representatives and ex-officio administrators formed to create policy and procedure in compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, and to facilitate membership in regional systems, consortia, and accreditation bodies. While modeled on democratic governing practices, "the principle of shared governance may be historically grounded in notions of expertise and professionalism, rather than in the concept of democracy" (Gerber, 2001, p. 23). This assertion is supported by the fact that at many colleges and universities, the technostructure and support staff (Mintzberg, 1979), such as human resources or computing services, are not traditionally included in the senate's voting membership since these units are not viewed as contributing to the core teaching and research missions of the organization (Gerber, 2001). As such, the faculty senate is an established area in which the collegium and the bureaucracy subcultures officially negotiate locus of authority and division of labor.

The development of the faculty identity in the collegium reveals conflict with the bureaucracy over locus of authority. In 1915, a group of educators formed the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to protect the interests of faculty against what they perceived to be a specific case of administrative interference in faculty affairs. In the landmark 1915 Declaration of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, the AAUP alluded to faculty
identity as something separate from industry and commerce when stating that the "conception of a university as an ordinary business venture, and of academic teaching as a purely private employment, manifests also a radical failure to apprehend the nature of the social function discharged by the professional scholar" (AAUP, 2015b, p. 6). In this same document, the AAUP also set limitations on administrative impingement on faculty autonomy in asserting,

For, once appointed, the scholar has professional functions to perform in which the appointing authorities have neither competency nor moral right to intervene. The responsibility of the university teacher is primarily to the public itself, and to the judgment of his own profession; and while, with respect to certain external conditions of his vocation, he accepts a responsibility to the authorities of the institution in which he serves, in the essentials of his professional activity his duty is to the wider public to which the institution itself is morally amenable. (AAUP, 2015b, p. 6)

Related to the collegium's claim to the curriculum are the practices of academic freedom and tenure, which reflect the collegium's belief that freedom of inquiry is a bulwark of an open and democratic society. AAUP's position on tenure is that it provides the economic security for teachers and scholars to exercise open inquiry secure from administrative interference or political authoritarianism. Tenure, in this sense, is a practical, social necessity. In the AAUP (2015c), 1940 Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure, colleges and universities are described as existing "for the common good and not for the interests of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole" (p. 14). Doumani (2006) provided a cogent explanation on why the collegium places primacy on the ethos of academic freedom as being a public good, and the inherent dangers of the collegium relinquishing all of its authority to the demands of a bureaucratic mindset. Doumani wrote,

Knowledge production driven by market forces that reflects the hierarchy of power slowly restructures institutions of higher learning by promoting certain lines of inquiry and quietly burying others. Over time, the process becomes hegemonic, in the sense that unwritten rules about what is fundable and what is not are bureaucratically internalized and modalities of self-censorship act as a filter for condoning or shunning proposed research, teaching, and extramural utterances. (p 38)

The moral dimension of membership in the collegium encompasses the belief that faculty status, which is enacted through teaching, research, and service commitments such as serving on the faculty senate, is a genuine expression of dedication to one's peers and students and to society as a whole (Gonzales \& Terosky, 2016; Manning, 2018). Consequently, many in the collegium "have generally been focused on their institutions' academic and research priorities, rather than on the fiscal bottom line" (Gerber, 2014, p. 121). This perspective not only defines the collegium but also colors how this subculture views the bureaucracy. Zemsky (2001) characterized the collegium's view of the bureaucracy as being an unavoidable necessity when he wrote,

The very notion of a manager in higher education has traditionally had a pejorative cast; managers are those who oversee functional tasks or execute the designs of their superiors. In the ideal conception of the academy, it is the faculty who serve as keepers and agents of the academic mission. The purpose of managers from the president through the custodial chief is to grease the wheels that make possible the fulfillment of that mission. In the most cynical estimation, even a department chair is simply a manager, tending to administrative details that allow others to do the exciting work. (p. 2)

As pressure from marketplace competition and increasing accountability from funding agencies has translated into more paperwork for central administration, it also has for faculty who are department chairpersons (Morris \& Laipple, 2015). Although faculty may recognize that the chairperson role involves significant amounts of what one former chairperson called "bureaucratic hack work" (Eisen, 1997, p. 20), the collegium's views of the chairperson's authority and institutional identity are not influenced by current market forces or financial exigencies, but by tradition. Even though the chairperson's duties have evolved over the years to include the work of a frontline manager (Gmelch \& Miskin, 2011; Hecht et al., 1999), many department faculty, including many chairpersons themselves, view the chairperson position as the part-time job or faculty service commitment that it once was decades ago (Eisen, 1997; Zemsky, 1990). Hecht et al. (1999) explained,

At one time, the chairperson position was reserved for the most prestigious scholars within the discipline. These chairpersons presided over departments in an almost ceremonial manner, and did not wrestle with budget cuts, declining enrollments, productivity reports, accountability measures, fund raising, or changing technology. While many institutions still stipulate that department chairpersons have a record of scholarship and publication, all institutions [now] expect chairpersons to be more than a role model or figurehead. Department faculty seek a strong advocate, a consensus builder, a budget wizard, and a superb manager. (p. 21)

Viewed from a cultural perspective, the expectation that chairpersons be disciplinary experts with little regard for their lack of administrative experience is manifest by how the collegium defines its own members. In terms of status, the tradition of disciplinary expertise takes precedence over positional power. In terms of authority, the tradition of faculty autonomy
translates into the desire for an insider, such as another member of the collegium, to take on the department-level administrative role (Altbach, 2011; Gerber, 2014; Ginsberg, 2011; Tucker, 1981).

Critical to understanding the organizational role conflict of the department chairperson is appreciating the tradition of autonomy that is deeply rooted in the collegium's belief system. In describing his vision of the professional bureaucracy, to which the collegium belongs, Mintzberg (1998) claimed that such "professionals require little direction and supervision. What they do require is protection and support. And so their managers [chairpersons] have to pay a lot of attention to managing the boundary condition of the organization" (p. 146). From the perspective of the collegium, the department chairperson is responsible for maintaining the standards and professional identity of the department, supervising departmental support staff, creating faculty teaching schedules, advocating for department concerns to central administration, and maintaining a collegial environment among a group of highly autonomous faculty peers (Bennett \& Figuli, 1993; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Leaming, 2007). However, to the collegium, the one thing a chairperson is not is the manager or supervisor of the faculty. In describing what might happen if a fellow faculty member were to occupy the department chairperson position longterm, one professor summed up the collegium's expectation of faculty autonomy by writing, Part of what I think would happen if you allowed people to be a chair too long is that they would tend more and more to accrete power in decision-making and do things without really consulting the department, or just take it for granted that they could do whatever they wanted. (Eisen, 1997, p. 20)

An expression of the fine line walked by most chairpersons between the collegium and bureaucracy subcultures is a deceptively simple statement in Andrews University's manual for
chairpersons: "As a department chair, you are ultimately responsible for the quality of faculty activity, even though most faculty work independently" (Faculty Policy and Development Council, n.d., p. 5). This describes the unenviable position of assuming personal responsibility with diminished relevant authority. On the one hand, the collegium subculture insists that the chairperson recognize the faculty's freedom from supervisory oversight in order to maintain its identity, political power, and social advantage (Manning, 2018; Mintzberg, 1979; Morgan, 2006); on the other hand, the bureaucracy subculture imposes result-oriented expectations of institutional effectiveness on the chairperson's administrative work (Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993).

## Bureaucracy Subculture

In his scathing indictment of the bureaucracy subculture, Ginsberg (2011), a senior faculty member at a major research institution, asserted, "I have spent time in university administrative suites and in the corridors of public agencies. In both settings I am always struck by the fact that so many well-paid individuals have so little to do" (p. 41). In contrast, Stanley Fish, professor and dean emeritus of a major research institution, claimed that administrators command higher salaries than faculty because "they work harder, they have more work to do, and they actually do it" (as cited in Jenkins, 2010, p. 117). However, Jenkins (2005), who worked successively as a faculty member with a heavy teaching load, a department chairperson, and an interim dean offered a third opinion when writing that, with regard to salary and workload, "being an administrator is more stressful [than teaching] and carries greater responsibility" (para. 5). These three opinions provide a variety of examples of how the bureaucracy may be viewed by those outside and inside this subculture.

As early as 1947, Day noted that, in spite of hierarchical status and higher salaries, the bureaucracy's role can be obscured by that of the collegium. Day wrote that, the functions of administration in academic life are secondary in the sense that the teaching and research for which colleges and universities exist can be carried on only by the professional staff [faculty]. From this point of view, administration justifies itself only as it facilitates and strengthens the work of the teachers and scholars. At bottom, this is true enough, and certainly we can all admit that administration is never an end in itself but only a means to an end. Nevertheless, it can be an indispensable means. (p. 340) By managing the day-to-day running of the institution, the bureaucracy fulfills the critical role of relieving the faculty of responsibilities that would otherwise divide their focus from research and teaching. In spite of his harsh criticisms of the bureaucracy, Ginsberg (2011) did note that "excellent administrators can be found on college and university campuses. Over the years, I have had the pleasure of working with several outstanding administrators" (p. 17).

The function of the administration focuses largely on resource management, public relations, and organizational effectiveness (Altbach \& Finkelstein, 1997/2013; Baldridge, 1971; Bok, 2003; Day, 1946; Manning, 2018). Because of the responsibilities to which they are assigned, people belonging to the bureaucracy subculture are inclined to favor standardization of processes, top-down communication, and centralized authority that is alien and sometimes antithetical to the collegium subculture (Birnbaum, 1988, 1992; Manning, 2018). However, the bureaucracy favors such processes in order to sustain an environment that is conducive to rational decision making (Mintzberg, 1979; Weber, 1922/1952).

In considering the organizational structure of higher education as it relates to the fulltime administrator's status and roles, it can be tempting to focus solely on Mintzberg's (1979)
professional bureaucracy where central administration is securely ensconced at the strategic apex of a linear hierarchy of power. However, people working in higher education administration consistently describe their working environment as being more indicative of the nonlinear, loosely and tightly coupled subsystems described by Birnbaum and Weick (Birnbaum, 1988, 1992; Bolman \& Gallos, 2011; M. D. Cohen \& March, 2000; Weick, 1976). Although fulltime administrators hold positional authority within the organization, they are also greatly constrained (Birnbaum, 1988; M. D. Cohen \& March, 2000). Unlike members of the collegium, administrators seldom control their days or set their own agenda (Birnbaum, 1988). Instead, they must embrace constant interruptions, diplomatically problem solve in the public eye, master and enforce policies influenced by different groups with divergent and sometimes contradictory goals, assume culpability for the actions of people who are not under their direct supervision, and comply with external regulations that confound or complicate the institution's mission (Birnbaum, 1988, 1992; Bolman \& Gallos, 2011; M. D. Cohen \& March, 2000; Holton, 1998; Manning, 2018; Tucker \& Bryan, 1998).

Higher education administration has been cited as "one of the most stressful occupations in American society" (Cloud, 1991, p. 24) because those in such positions "experience equivocal environments, [and] are affected by cognitive limitations that require them to make judgements under conditions of uncertainty" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 22). These limitations are the result of what M. D. Cohen and March (1986) called the "organized anarchy" (p. 82) of the higher education environment. The division of labor between a collegium that is responsible for the curriculum and a bureaucracy that is responsible for institutional effectiveness can confound locus of authority to the point of inefficiency for the fulltime administrator. As Altbach (2011) maintained, those in the bureaucracy subculture deal with "Professional myths-of collegial
decision making, individual autonomy, and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge-[that] come into conflict with the realities of complex organizational structures and bureaucracies" (p. 235).

In the "organized anarchy" (M. D. Cohen \& March, 1986) of higher education in general, and shared governance specifically, decision making is dispersed as people in the collegium and the bureaucracy subcultures focus on competing opportunities based on their own belief systems and preferences (Birnbaum, 1988, 1992; M. D. Cohen \& March, 1986; Eckel \& Kezar, 2011; Gerber, 2014; Manning, 2018; Weick, 1976). To reduce the anarchical nature of the environment, the bureaucracy is highly motivated to impose order through positional authority and the standardization and centralization of processes (Manning, 2018; Mintzberg, 1979). The bureaucracy's focus on standardization and centralized authority is not a new phenomenon and has historical roots (Thelin, 2004). As far back as 1888, Princeton's president, Francis Patton, declared in his inaugural address that "college administration is a business in which trustees are partners, professors the salesmen, and students the customers" (Rudolph, 1962/1990, pp. 160161).

An early 20th century study of American colleges and universities funded by the Carnegie Foundation reported that a typical academic department "operates and maintains its own building, disciplines its students, arranges for the work of its teaching staff, and provides the course of instruction" (Cooke, 1910, p. 12). In the same report, it was noted that such departmental-level administration threatened institutional effectiveness because it "is being maintained very largely at the expense of the solidarity of the institution as a whole" (Cooke, 1910, p. 13). While this caution may be interpreted as a power block on faculty autonomy, it can also be seen as the bureaucracy's focus on centralizing resources to reduce redundancy and waste.

Fundamental to understanding the organizational role conflict of the department chairperson in negotiating their role with fulltime administrators is to note the bureaucracy's frustration with the perceived "tendency on the part of some [the collegium] to believe that it is sufficient to focus solely on educational outcomes, and on how to improve them, and that the availability of resources will somehow take care of itself" (Bowen \& Tobin, 2015, pp. 177-178). McNay (1995) provided an articulate description of the bureaucracy's perspective when he wrote,

In the bureaucracy, regulation becomes important. This can have many positive objectives: consistency of treatment in areas such as equal opportunities or financial allocations; quality of activities by due process of consideration; priority of behavior by regulatory oversight; and efficiency through standard operating procedures. Committees become arenas for policy development or commentary and iteration with the executive. (pp. 106-107)

While AAUP's (2015d) best practices emphatically claim the collegium's control of the curriculum on such bodies as the faculty senate, Tighe (2003) voiced the view that faculty senators' "input is advisory in character, and not binding on the administration" (pp. 45-46). Gerber (2014) noted that "mounting pressures from governing boards and legislatures for colleges and universities to use externally imposed metrics for assessing performance have resulted in an overall weakening of the practices of shared governance that had developed over the previous century" (p. 121). In the contemporary college and university, funding issues exert great pressure to generate revenue (Garrett \& Poock, 2011; Zemsky et al., 2005). Consequently, both administrators and faculty work in a more fast paced, results-oriented environment than they did in the past (Meek et al., 2010; Thelin, 2004). In such a fast paced environment,
administrators seek department chairpersons who have "superb managerial and communication skills, and are able to implement university policies and directives" (Hecht et al., 1999, p. 21) that will assist them in finding "unity of direction" (Manning, 2018, p. 17) for the organization as a whole.

## Background and Development of Role Theory

Role theory is a collection of conceptual models used by social scientists to describe how people envision, interpret, and enact their daily lives through categories of set behaviors (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Gross et al., 1958; Nye, 1976; Rizzo et al., 1970) and is used as a theoretical framework by scholars specializing in business administration, sociology, education administration, anthropology, psychology, social work, criminology, gender studies, family studies, and other branches of scientific investigation (Dillon, 2014; Gross et al., 1958; Nye, 1976). Broadness of interpretation concerning the finer points of role theory exists such that "many definitions of the term have been presented in the social science literature, representing different disciplines, different points of view within disciplines, and, in some cases, different formulations of an individual author" (Gross et al., 1958, p. 11). Moreover, role theory is approached from two basic perspectives: structural and interactionist (Biddle, 1986; Dillon, 2014; Gross et al., 1958; Nye, 1976).

While these conditions serve to create a rich body of role theory literature, what also has been created is discipline-specific terminology and some lack of consensus on what constitutes role theory (Dillon, 2014; Gross et al., 1958; Nye, 1976). As Biddle (1986) noted, "Confusion entered role theory because its basic theatrical metaphor was applied only loosely and because its earliest proponents differed in the ways they used terms. Unfortunately, these differences persist in current literature" (p. 68). Since this study focused on the department chairperson's
organizational role conflict, I employed a structural theoretical framework. However, in order to draw clear distinctions between the structural and interactionist perspectives and to demonstrate why the structural perspective provides a suitable theoretical framework for this study, it is useful to review select aspects of early role theory development.

Although Western philosophers had for centuries explored themes related to concepts of the self and society (Seigel, 2005), it was not until the 1930s that role theory began to emerge among scholars who were influenced by 19th century continental philosophical traditions (Miner, 1982) privileging human experience as phenomena worth examining in cultural, historical, and political contexts (Lawlor, 2012). In their canonical history of the development of role theory, Biddle and Thomas (1966) traced the theory's antecedents to three American social scientists: Mead, Moreno, and Linton. These scholars were part of a zeitgeist that sparked the development of several theoretical models in the social sciences, two of these being role theory and symbolic interactionism (Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Blumer, 1969; Gross et al., 1958).

Mead (1934/1962), a sociologist, psychologist, and a leader in the development of symbolic interactionism theory, proposed individual behavior as part of the "rôle-taking" (p. 254) process in which interaction with other people, places, and things are a source of clues as to what should drive behavior (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934/1962). This is what Mead (1934/1962) called the individual's appreciation for "the generalized other" (p. 154); hence, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). However, this type of interpretation can only fully occur when the individual experiences these things through "social interaction that one has with one's fellows" (Mead, 1934/1962, p. 2). As Blumer (1969) noted,

In non-symbolic interactionism, human beings respond directly to one another's gestures or actions; in symbolic interactionism they interpret each other's gestures and act on the basis of the meaning yielded by the interpretation. An unwitting response to the tone of another's voice illustrates non-symbolic interaction. Interpreting the shaking of a fist as signifying that a person is preparing to attack illustrates symbolic interaction. (pp. 65-66) A fundamental component of Mead's concept of role taking is the emphasis placed on how the individual's perspective alters based on interpretations of daily interactions (Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934/1962). As Coutu (1951) explained, In Mead's usage the term [role taking] refers to that phase of the symbolic process by which a person momentarily pre-tends to himself that he is another person, projects himself into the perceptual field of the other person, imaginatively "puts him-self in the other's place," in order that he may get an insight into the other person's probable behavior in a given situation. The purpose of this is to enable him to get the other person's "point of view" so that he can anticipate the other's behavior and then act accordingly. (pp. 180-181)

To use the above example, how an individual might respond to another person shaking a fist would be interpreted through the sum total of that individual's experience up to that moment in time. If the gesture is interpreted as an attack, the individual takes on the role of one who may feel fear and flee. However, what this particular gesture means to that same individual can change over time, as exposure to new and different interactions influences future behavior. In this manner role taking, as Mead (1934/1962) described it, is historically and socially situated (Blumer, 1969).

During the same period, psychiatrist, psychosociologist, and Romanian expatriate Moreno (1934/1978) introduced the therapeutic use of "roleplaying" (p.348) into his study of group psychotherapy. While the terms role taking and role playing are sometimes used interchangeably (Coutu, 1951; Kelley et al., 1974; J. L. Moreno, 1934/1978), J. L. Moreno (1934/1978) was careful to assert that "Mead's concept of roletaking and my concept of roleplaying mean two different approaches" (p. 689). Mead (1934/1962) viewed role taking as a form of social prescription in that "the immediate effect of such rôle-taking lies in the control which the individual is able to exercise over his own responses" (p. 254). However, J. L. Moreno (1934/1978) conceptualized role playing as "playing a role spontaneously, modifying it and warming it up in ever-novel situations" (p. 690). The fundamental component of role playing in group therapy is to situate the individual in a naturalistic setting and to explore behavior through that individual's role playing with others. According to J. L. Moreno's son, J. D. Moreno (2014), this was an intentional break from the isolated therapeutic environment espoused by Freud, and from the separateness of the individual from society, as described by Mead (1934/1962). Coutu (1951) described role playing as referring to "behavior, performance, conduct, [and] overt activity" (p. 180) and compared this to role taking, which he described as "a strictly mental or cognitive or empathic activity" (p. 180).

In the 1930s and 1940s the anthropologist, Linton (1936), synthesized (1) Mead's concept of role taking as the individual's ability to assign meaning to personalized experience and (2) Moreno's role playing as a manifestation of the individual's ability to create meaning in concert with others, and related these two concepts to a more structural perspective (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966). Linton's important contribution to the development of role theory was his association of role with that of social position to describe predictable patterns of
behavior. These patterns, however, can only be decoded when examined in context with the specific human systems, subcultures, or groups to which each individual belongs. In explaining how role and social position relate, Linton (1936) wrote,

A rôle represents the dynamic aspect of status. The individual is socially assigned to a status and occupies it with relation to other statuses. When he puts the rights and duties which constitute the status into effect, he is performing a rôle. Rôle and status are quite inseparable, and the distinction between them is of only academic interest. There are no rôles without statuses, the term rôle is used with a double significance. Every individual has a series of rôles deriving from the various patterns in which he participates and at the same time a rôle, general, which represents the sum total of these rôles and determines what he does for his society and what he can expect from it. (p. 114)

As Biddle and Thomas (1966) noted, Linton's "idea that an individual's behavior could be construed as role performance implied that role was one linkage between individual behavior and social structure" (p. 7).

Reviewing these early concepts in role theory development assist in discriminating between interactionist and structural approaches used by contemporary social scientists. Symbolic interactionists view "institutions not in terms of organizational structure (of hierarchically organized, impersonal offices and duties) and norms of bureaucratic rationality" (Dillon, 2014, p. 280) but as "arrangements of people who are interlinked in their respective actions" (Blumer, 1969, p. 58). While the interactionist approach to role theory is used by scientists to examine roles enacted around personal characteristics, such as gender and race (Dillon, 2014), the structural approach is applied to roles enacted through social and organizational position (Nye, 1976). The structural approach is the lens through which the role
conflict of the department chairperson has traditionally been examined (Allen, 2003; Aziz et al., 2005; Bowman, 2002; Hecht et al., 1999; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Lucas, 2000; Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993).

As may be expected, the structural approach to role theory shares a distant pedigree with organizational theory (Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Dillon, 2014) as utilized by Mintzberg (1979), Birnbaum (1988), and Morgan (2006). Both structural role theory and organizational theory can be traced, in part, to the fin de siècle German sociologist and political economist, Weber (1902/1946, 1922/1952), who defined bureaucracy as a social structure stratified by the division of labor organized by specialization (expertise) and governed by rules (formalization) that, in turn, impacts locus of authority (Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Birnbaum, 1988; Dillon, 2014; Gumport, 2007; Merton, 1957; Mintzberg, 1979). As early as 1957, role theorist, Merton, drew explicit corollaries between Weber's $(1902 / 1946)$ conception of social stratification and Linton's $(1936,1945)$ explanation of status attainment when he described the dynamics of social positions.

## Organizational Role Theory

Organizational role theory was introduced during the mid-20th century to describe the structural perspective of role enactment as it relates specifically to task-oriented, formal organizations (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Biddle, 1986; Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970). Parsons (1951), Merton (1957), Gross at al. (1958), and Kahn et al. (1964) are credited with introducing organizational role theory into the lexicon (Biddle, 1986; Bess \& Dee, 2012). In this paradigm, the workplace organization is defined as existing "in an objective environment; it is an objective organization, in contrast to the 'psychological organization' that exists in the mind of the jobholder" (Kahn et al., 1964, p. 12).

Organizational role theory is a product of the management sciences (Biddle, 1986; Bess \& Dee, 2012; Hardy \& Conway, 1988), where two broad categories are used to frame roles in the workplace: functional and behavioral (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Hardy \& Conway, 1988; Welbourne et al., 1998). The functional definition of an organizational role focuses on a "network of interlocking responsibilities" (Bess \& Dee, 2012, p. 246) and relates locus of authority and division of labor directly to organizational structure and rules (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Birnbaum, 1988; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979). Functional roles are described by tasks performed as a series of inputs and outputs within an objectified system (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Birnbaum, 1988; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979; Weick, 1976). This functionally based definition describes how a role contributes to the mission of the organization (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Mintzberg, 1979).

However, another definition used by management theorists relates organizational roles to behavioral expectations in addition to functional effects (Bess \& Dee, 2012). This definition moves beyond framing the organization as an objective system and instead casts it as a human system in which behaviors contribute to task-oriented activities and organizational goals (Katz \& Kahn, 1978). As Bess and Dee (2012) noted, "Roles in this behavioral sense are formal positions defined in terms of expected right and duties" (p.247). Motivations for enacting roles are also influenced by role expectations constructed around social, political, and legal systems; influenced by physical and geographic boundaries; and altered by changes in technology (Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Ford \& Slocum, 1977; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Merton, 1957). Moreover, people will enact roles within organizations out of a sense of personal fulfillment or in response to a supervisor's authority (Katz \& Kahn, 1978). Identity within the organization is formed through the individual's relationships with other workers, such an immediate supervisor, direct reports,
and peers (Biddle, 1979; Kahn et al., 1964; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Manning, 2018; Merton, 1957; Morgan, 2006). These groupings of people are defined as role sets (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Kahn et al., 1964; Merton, 1957).

While identity and division of labor can be defined by the role sets to which each individual within the organization belongs, identity is also driven by status. Gross et al. (1958) provided a definition of position which informs the hierarchical underpinnings of organizational role theory when they wrote, "Position is the location of an actor or class of actors in a system of social relationships" (p. 48). Positions within the organization do pertain to division of labor and identity (Gross et al., 1958; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Kahn et al., 1964); however, position is also a marker of locus of authority as the individual's position or place within the organization cannot be understood until it is interpreted relative to the positions of other people (Gross et al., 1958). In this manner, authority relates to one's status, or position, within the organization in relation to everyone else (Ashforth, 2001; Bess \& Dee, 2012; Kahn et al., 1964; Merton, 1957; Parsons, 1951). Since research on the department chairperson's role conflict suggests that the conflict arises out of both task-oriented duties and behavioral expectations (Hecht et al., 1999; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Sharma, 1971; Tucker, 1981, 1993), I have incorporated both the functional and behavioral definitions of organizational roles into this study.

## Basic Tenets

As organizational role theory was being developed, scholars formulated a general model of role theory that can be applied to examining the individual's role within the structure of social systems (Biddle \& Thomas, 1966). The basic tenets of role theory that focus explicitly on the structural dimension, including organizational role theory are:

- A social system, or human system, is a predictable series of interrelationships between individuals within a system that is sustained by shared values, shared goals, and/or geographical proximity. There can be many groups, or subsystems, within one larger system (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966;

Birnbaum, 1988; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Linton, 1936, 1945; Merton, 1957; Nye, 1976).

- Division of labor, locus of authority, status, and identity within a human system or subsystem is formalized by positions held within that system, which are then enacted through roles (Ashforth, 2001; Bess \& Dee, 2012; Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Gross et al., 1958; Hardy \& Conway, 1988; Linton, 1936, 1945; Mintzberg, 1976; Nye, 1976).
- Roles define sets of permitted behaviors, as dictated by social norms such as shared values and goals. These role norms drive expectations of one's own behaviors and of others' behaviors. Roles help define membership or nonmembership in a system and subsystem, and assist in defining individual and group identities (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Gross et al., 1958; Hardy \& Conway, 1988; Linton, 1936, 1945; Miner, 1971).
- The manner in which an individual interprets and makes meaning of her role is called role identity (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Kahn et al., 1964; Linton, 1945; Van Sell et al., 1981).
- Individuals simultaneously inhabit different roles that are defined by the different human systems and subsystems to which they belong. In essence, individuals have many role identities. Individuals will conform to a set of behaviors as
defined by roles, called role expectations, if there is a perceived benefit for doing so. Benefits include social acceptance and belonging, and the attainment of material or social advantages. Another benefit can be the avoidance of social pressure (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Birnbaum, 1988; Coutu, 1951; Gross et al., 1958; Miner, 1971; Nye, 1976).
- Individual behaviors that conform to societal role expectations within a particular human system or subsystem are considered admissible behaviors by others in that same system. Such role conformity is rewarded and reinforced through social acceptance and belonging, and material or social benefits (Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Hardy \& Conway, 1988; Kahn et al., 1964; Linton, 1936, 1945).
- Individual behaviors that do not conform to role expectations within a particular human system or subsystem are considered novel or deviant by others in that system, and may be subject to change through social pressure (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Hardy \& Conway, 1988; Merton, 1957; Nye, 1976).
- Alterations to a human system or subsystem can render some roles within that system obsolete and subject to change through social pressure (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Linton, 1936).


## Role Conflict

In addition to adopting these basic tenets of role theory, I adopted the definition of role conflict as expressed through the language of organizational role theory. Though seemingly precise in terminology, the nomenclature of organizational role conflict describes a web of mutable, recursive, and generative conditions that reflect the highly complex networks of human
interactions, and interpretations of interactions, within a human system or groups of subsystems (Gross et al., 1958). Although role conflict terminology was first embraced and developed by organizational role theorists (Biddle, 1979, 1986), some social scientists approach role theory from an interactionist perspective and employ the language of organizational role conflict (Dillon, 2014). Moreover, because role theory is a large and multidisciplinary collection of paradigms, subtle differences in conceptions of role conflict exist that can confound precision of research focus (Biddle, 1986; Gross et al., 1958). While some scholars define role conflict as "the extent to which a person experiences pressures within one role that are incompatible with the pressures that arise within another role" (Kopelman et al., 1983, p. 201), I adopted a more nuanced definition of role conflict that makes room for the distinction between interrole and intrarole conflict.

## Interrole and Intrarole Conflict

Another accepted definition of role conflict, and the one I employed in this study, does not confine the conflict between two or more roles. Rather, role conflict is the personal distress that is manifest when there are incompatible or divergent organizational demands or expectations placed on the individual in the fulfillment of one role or many roles, where compliance with these demands is judged by that individual to be difficult or impossible (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966). Often the precise cause of this tension may not be fully recognized by the person experiencing the conflict, or by the role set or organization in which the conflict exists (Biddle, 1979). Role conflict in this broader sense is divided in two subcategories (1) interrole conflict occurs when the demands of one role held by the incumbent are incompatible with the demands of another role held by the incumbent (which is the narrower definition of role conflict previously cited) and (2) intrarole conflict, which occurs when there is a lack of consensus
between individuals and groups about the expectations of a single role held by the incumbent (Biddle, 1979, 1986).

An example of interrole conflict is a department chairperson who lives the experience of teaching classes, along with her department faculty peers, who also must evaluate these peers for merit-based salary increases. In this case, interrole conflict arises when her department faculty choose to invoke her role as their faculty peer, and ignore her complementary role as a department-level frontline manager. Conflict arises for the chairperson when she senses that these faculty resent her documented managerial obligation to evaluate their performance for merit pay. In contrast, intrarole conflict emerges for this chairperson when she lives the experience of being in the middle of an ongoing disagreement between her department faculty and her associate dean concerning her authority to schedule each of her department colleagues to teach one online section of a class that they normally teach in person. In this case, her associate dean is holding her personally accountable for enforcing a campus-wide directive to support online teaching. However many faculty in her department are adamant that a chairperson is only responsible for scheduling classes through department consensus, and does not have the authority to assign classes to others (Birnbaum, 1988).

## Role Conflict Within Organizations

When using the perspective of organizational role theory, role conflict is "focused on social systems that are preplanned, task-oriented, and hierarchical" (Biddle, 1979, p. 73) and provides a suitable theoretical scaffold on which to study the department chairperson's position within the bureaucratic and hierarchical structure of higher education (Carroll \& Gmelch, 1994). Using a structural lens, an individual's role set creates and perpetuates beliefs and values related to roles. Role theorists use the term, consensus, to describe both explicit and tacit agreement
among members of a role set concerning the expectations for the individual members of that group (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Kahn et al., 1964). As people in a social system form normative concepts of behavior and social position, people operating in that system "know what they should do, and all persons in the system can be counted on to support those norms with sanctions" (Biddle, 1986, p. 76).

Consensus creates role expectations, which in turn drive behavior (Kahn et al., 1964). However, the expectations of a particular role set to which the individual belongs can be at variance with the expectations of another role set. If deviant behavior by either role set is detected, members of a particular role set may exert social pressure, or role pressure, upon the individual to get him or her to conform (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Kahn et al., 1964). Role pressure is enacted both formally and informally, such as through an email detailing an official sanction or teasing during a lunch break, and can be verbal or nonverbal, such as a verbal put-down or the act of ignoring another (Kahn et al., 1964). Role ambiguity is manifest when there is confusion, or a lack of consensus, of role expectations (Biddle, 1986), while role overload, also called interrole conflict, is "having too many role demands and too little time [and resources] to fulfill them" (Coverman, 1989, p. 967). Role expectation and role ambiguity contribute to role conflict; however, "role strain is an outcome of role conflict and overload" (Creary \& Gordon, 2016, p.1).

These conditions, filtered through the perspective of the university as organization, have defined and described the role conflict of the department chairperson in higher education for the past six decades. Research on chairperson role conflict has covered issues touching on division of labor, locus of authority, and professional identity to examine dimensions of role conflict against an organizational framework. This large body of research indicates strong scholarly
consensus of organizational role conflict as being an expected and unavoidable condition of the chairperson's job in the traditional college and university.

## Department Chairperson Versus Department Head

Although the majority of research on the role conflict of the academic frontline manager employs the job titles of department chairperson or department chair, some authors, such as Sharma (1971), have used the title of department head. An overlooked conflation of the two job titles occurs in the research literature on U.S. higher education, where in some studies the titles are used either interchangeably or concurrently and without explanation (Deal, 2014; Gearhart et al., 2018; Grumbles \& Norman, 1994; McCaffrey et al., 1989; Massengale, 1994). Concerning role conflict studies in which both job titles appear in the text, I have not located any in which an explanation of the difference between the two titles is included for the reader.

This imprecision in terminology has the potential to confound understanding between those who do, and those who do not make a distinction between the two titles in U.S. higher education. For those making a distinction, it is asserted that a department head is a permanent administrative position in which the incumbent serves at the pleasure of a college dean or chief academic officer. The department chairperson, in contrast, serves on a rotational basis for a predetermined amount of time, and with the direct approval of the academic department (Is There Any, 2014; Krause, 2006; Porter, 1961). This distinction impinges on locus of authority and organizational status. If an administrator appoints the department head, either with or without faculty approval, it may be presumed that this frontline manager will possess and enact the reflected positional authority and status of the administrator. Conversely, since department chairpersons are normally chosen by their department peers with an administrator's subsequent approval, the chairperson's authority is the product of a bottom-up appointment. Therefore,
chairpersons possess less positional authority and status than a person directly appointed by an administrator. However, some have also noted that local, institutional culture can influence locus of authority to the point that assumptions concerning locus of authority between the two positions are clouded (Is There Any, 2014; Porter, 1961).

Complicating the terminology further are those who assert that the two job titles are used interchangeably at their institutions, both colloquially and in policy documents (Emslie, 2013; Is There Any, 2014). Outside of the research and professional literature, I encountered a public, doctoral-granting university in the southern United States that has historically used the titles of department chairperson and department head interchangeably in policy documents (Western Kentucky, 1989, 2013, 2020). This same university currently employs administratively appointed department heads in some academic departments, while department elected chairpersons are employed in other academic departments (D. George, personal conversation, March 3, 2020). The existence of such irregularities in terminology and practice suggest that, while there are notable, critical differences in locus of authority and status between the two positions, such differences may not be extant in all instances. Further, that such irregularities in terminology and practice exist suggests that the differences between the chairperson and department head positions have not been adequately examined in the research canon.

## Organizational Role Studies

The study of chairperson organizational role conflict appeared as a research topic in the literature after Lane (1967) published his master's thesis on chairperson conflict using role theory as a conceptual framework. Lane interviewed 89 department chairpersons on their role in the awarding of tenure in their colleges and schools. He confined his research to participants working at the University of Florida, and concluded that role ambiguity and role overload were
contributing factors in participants' involvement in faculty evaluations within their academic departments. Meanwhile, Sharma (1969) published a position paper on what he described as "the cold war" (p. 24) between administration and faculty, and the dearth of research into administrative practices in higher education. Although Sharma (1971) referred to all administrative levels in his paper, he was one of the first to claim, "many deans and department heads are blithely unaware of their goals, their rationale and the long range consequences of their policies" (p. 25).

Early studies examining the department chairperson in four-year colleges and universities focused on naming the chairperson's duties and responsibilities. Although there was great variation in terminology among these early researchers concerning task-oriented behaviors versus organizational roles, it is possible to trace a growing awareness of the complexity of the chairperson's job as these work-related behaviors and responsibilities were identified and categorized by researchers. In their study of faculty operations and curriculum development in higher education, Dressel et al. (1970) noted the variety of duties that fell to chairpersons. Although the focus of their research centered on the department unit within the larger organization, they listed 23 separate "demands" (Dressel et al., 1970, p. 13) placed on the chairperson, ranging from teaching, resource management, and office management to mentoring, advocacy, and policy enforcement and regulation. Hoyt and Spangler (1979) surveyed 103 department chairpersons and 1,333 faculty from four doctoral-granting institutions to test the validity of an instrument to measure chairperson performance, and they found that both cohorts ranked (1) good communication, (2) curriculum development and, (3) stimulating research productivity as top priorities for chairpersons.

In a smaller study, Siever et al. (1972) surveyed 481 faculty and administrators at two land grant universities on 12 predetermined "characteristics" (p. 407) of an effective department chairperson. Both faculty and administrators ranked (1) support for teaching, (2) achievement of goals, (3) recruitment of faculty, (4) good organization, (5) sound scholarship and, (6) decisive action as the most important characteristics. Although Siever et al. (1972) used the term, "role perceptions" (p. 405), in describing respondents' attitudes towards the 12 characteristics, this language was used colloquially and unrelated to a theoretical framework. Of note is the authors' awareness of academic subcultures when they observed that the congruency between faculty and administrator responses in their study may point to the possibility that "the effective chairman must be capable of simultaneously holding values of both faculty and administrative groups" (Siever et al., 1972, p. 407).

Sharma (1971), focusing on organizational roles, investigated the normative role expectations of academic department heads by surveying 22 heads, three deans, and three vice presidents to rank nine predetermined chairperson "abilities" (p. 36) in order of importance. These included,
the ability to attract and retain faculty members; attract and retain students; communicate and implement goals and polices; conduct independent research and teach; develop curricula; handle friction and work under pressure; produce new ideas and make contacts; as well as foster better formulations of departmental goals, policies and budgets; and better relations between the dean, administrative staff, and institutional relations. (Sharma, 1971, p. 39)

Sharma reported that the abilities ranked highest by respondents were (1) the ability of the department head to communicate and implement goals and policies, (2) the ability to attract and
retain faculty members, and (3) the ability to foster better formulations of departmental goals, policies, and budgets. Sharma asserted that these were the top three role pressures placed upon chairpersons by their role set (fellow chairpersons, deans, and vice presidents) within the organization.

As an early foray into the subject matter, Sharma's (1971) study was shallow, and the broad inferences he drew upon these limited data were weak. Sharma claimed that his study "delineated the role of the department head in the context of the total university environment" (p. 38). However, the small pool of subjects decreased generalizability. Sharma did not employ maximum variation of sampling the three categories of people surveyed, did not survey faculty, and recruited all respondents from the same Midwestern university. In addition, he did not separate the deans and vice presidents' responses from that of department heads in reporting the data. In spite of these weaknesses, by recognizing the importance that role expectations play in relation to organizational effectiveness, Sharma's study is germinal as it was the first published study to use the language of role theory to investigate the working conditions of academic department frontline managers.

In response to these early studies, the American Council on Education funded Tucker to devise training materials for department chairpersons in Florida. Tucker (1981) studied the working environments of chairpersons in the nine universities that then made up the Florida State system, asking chairpersons about their experiences. He collected these data in unpublished surveys and interviews, and canvased chairpersons outside the Florida system at undisclosed universities. Tucker (1981) tested these data in training seminars and refined his materials using chairperson feedback. The resultant information was published as the 1981 book, Chairing the Academic Department: Leadership Among Peers. Although Tucker (1981) did not use role
theory to analyze or present the data he collected, he did popularize the notion of the chairperson's position as "paradoxical" (p. 4) in nature due to incongruous and conflicting coworker expectations. Tucker's influential book was the first nationally published manual for chairpersons in the United States. Demand for it justified the publication of subsequent editions (Gmelch \& Miskin, 1995, 2004; Tucker, 1984, 1993), as it still serves as an exemplar for the many how-to chairperson manuals published since its introduction.

Whereas previous researchers conflated specific task-oriented behaviors with broader motivations and priorities in defining the job of the department chairperson, Tucker (1981) made the distinction between the concept of a duty and a role in deconstructing the daily work of chairpersons. He defined duties as specific "tasks and responsibilities" (p.2) and listed 48 duties reminiscent of the wide variety of behaviors that had been identified in the previous decade. To manage this long, diversified list, Tucker divided the 48 duties into 8 categories (Table 1).

## Table 1

Tucker's Eight Categories of Chairperson Duties with Select Examples

| Category | Select Duties |
| :--- | :--- |
| Department governance | develop long-range department programs, plans, and goals; <br> establish department committees; prepare for accreditation and <br> evaluation |
| Instruction | monitor dissertations, prospectuses and programs of study for <br> graduate students; schedule classes; update department curricula, <br> courses, and programs |
| Faculty affairs | evaluate faculty performance; initiate promotion and tenure <br> recommendations; maintain morale |
| Student affairs | advice and counsel students; recruit and select students; work with <br> student government |

Table 1 (continued)

| Category | Select Duties |
| :--- | :--- |
| External communication | communicate department needs to dean and interact with upper- <br> level administration; improve and maintain the department's image <br> and reputation; process department correspondence and requests <br> for information |
| Budgets and resources | encourage faculty to submit proposals for contracts and grants to <br> government agencies and private foundations; prepare annual <br> reports; prepare, propose, and administer department budget |
| Office management | maintain essential department records; manage department <br> facilities and equipment, including maintenance and inventory; <br> supervise and evaluate departmental clerical and technical staff |
| Professional development | encourage department faculty to participate in professional <br> meetings; foster good teaching in the department; stimulate faculty <br> research and publication |

Adapted from Chairing the Academic Department: Leadership among Peers (pp. 2-3), by A.
Tucker, 1981, American Council on Education. Copyright 1981 by American Council on
Education.

Tucker's book offered the most comprehensive and detailed inventory of department chairperson duties to date, and since cohorts of chairpersons in training seminars had authenticated the data, it became a trusted resource in shaping later research into chairperson working conditions, training, and development (Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004).

In examining the roles chairpersons enact within their institutions, Tucker (1981) defined the term, role, as "how or in what capacity the chairperson relates to an individual or a group in performing an activity [duty]" (p. 4). This definition is significant. Even though Tucker (1981) did not explicitly rely on role theory in his analysis, the lens through which he examined the chairperson was rooted in the same socially constructed behavioral patterns that Linton (1945)
associated with status and that Biddle (1979) associated with "behaviors characteristic of one or more persons in a context" (p. 393). Tucker (1984) identified 28 potential roles that chairpersons are obligated to assume within the normal course of their workday (Table 2).

## Table 2

Tucker's 28 Chairperson Roles Categorized by Subculture

| Category | Roles |
| :--- | :--- |
| Collegialadvisor-counselor, advocator, communicator, facilitator, mediator- <br> negotiator, mentor, motivator, peacemaker, peer-colleague, <br> recommender, representer, researcher, teacher |  |
| Adapted from Chairing the academic department: Leadership among peers (p. 4), by A. Tucker, |  |
| anticipator, coordinator, decision-maker, delegator, entrepreneur, <br> evaluator, implementer, innovator, leader, manager, organizer, <br> 1984, American Council on Education. Copyright 1984 by American Council on Education. |  |

Although Tucker did not classify these 28 roles, for the purposes of this study they are presented in Table 2 as falling within two general categories, (1) collegial and (2) bureaucratic, as a means of conceptualizing the work of the chairperson within the collegium and bureaucracy subcultures. Duties dealing mostly with democratic and collaborative behaviors are placed in the collegial category, while duties that predominantly center on procedure and authority are placed in the bureaucratic category. In making these distinctions to Tucker's data, it is easier to see how the chairperson can be pulled between the collegium's ethos of collectivism and the bureaucracy's focus on top-down management when enacting these 28 separate roles.

Tucker's (1981) emphasis on organizational roles allowed him to relate to chairpersons within a framework of role theory. In so doing, he asserted that many of the 28 roles he had
identified forced chairpersons into equivocal situations, where the role expectations of faculty and administrator are divergent or oppositional, and where the demands of assuming so many roles in one person is extremely difficult. As Tucker (1981) noted, "The chairperson is a leader, yet is seldom given the scepter of undisputed authority" (p. 4), who must assume an "astonishing variety of tasks and duties" (p. 4).

## Role Conflict Studies

Subsequent studies that employed role theory focused predominantly on role ambiguity, which is the state of inhabiting a role without fully knowing the expectations for that role, and role overload, which is the state of not having enough resources to enact the role. These studies examined how chairperson role ambiguity and role overload can then lead to role conflict, which is discord related to enacting one or more roles, and role strain, the emotional discord emanating from such conflict. Seedorf and Gmelch (1989) used a structured, observational method developed by Mintzberg (1973) to document the actions of a chairperson-participant working in a major research university who managed a department of nine fulltime faculty. During an 8-day period, the authors observed the participant in 50 scheduled meetings, seven unscheduled meetings, four telephone calls, nine tours of the campus, and nine separate sessions of paperwork. In addition to observation, the study included in-depth interviews with the participant and with two chairpersons from other departments at the same university. In the interviews, the authors determined that the participant considered the workload and activities occurring during the observation period as typical. From their observational data, they determined that $69 \%$ of the participant's day was devoted to meetings and $15 \%$ to paperwork. The authors reported that the participant indicated that the meetings robbed time needed to complete required paperwork and
concluded that role overload and role strain, which they framed within the context of time management, were the greatest sources of frustration for this chairperson.

Carroll and Gmelch (1992) mailed a questionnaire to 800 chairpersons at doctoral granting institutions, asking them to rate themselves on their effectiveness in various chairperson duties. A total of 539 questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of $67.5 \%$. Carroll and Gmelch's maintained that measurements of self-reported effectiveness would help to determine chairperson sub-roles. Using factor analysis, they identified "four sub-roles: (1) leader, (2) scholar, (3) faculty-developer, and (4) manager" (Carroll \& Gmelch, 1992, p. 7-8). Through factor analysis of these data, the authors asserted that the more favored aspects of a particular chairperson's role, such as preferring manager to scholar, is a reflection of personal preference and outlook, and that the role conflict a chairperson experiences is correlated to these preferences.

Burns and Gmelch (1995) subsequently developed a survey instrument, called the Chair Stress Inventory that they used to survey 523 chairpersons from 100 randomly selected doctoral granting institutions. Using factor analysis, they categorized job stress by type. The five categories identified were,
faculty role stress, administrative role stress, both related to role conflict brought on by the divergent role expectations of these two groups, role ambiguity stress, perceived expectation stress, which is a form of role strain and administrative task stress, which is role overload (Burns \& Gmelch, 1995, p. 16).

The authors also examined the data on how subjects answered questions about their orientation to being a faculty member, an administrator, or both and found that chairpersons who saw themselves predominantly as either faculty or administrator reported similar levels of
satisfaction with their roles. However, subjects who identified equally as both faculty and administrator had comparably higher levels of dissatisfaction with their own performance. This led the authors to posit that being oriented to have one's "feet firmly planted in the faculty and administrative camps" (Burns \& Gmelch, 1995, p. 20) can cause extreme issue of role ambiguity.

After organizational role conflict had been firmly established as a reality of the chairperson's job during the final decades of the 20th century, the literature on chairpersons published during the current century thus far has focused mainly on training issues (Aziz et al., 2005; Burke et al., 2015; Gmelch, 2015; Gonaim, 2016; Rothgeb et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2013). However, there are four notable exceptions of qualitative investigations into chairperson role conflict published from 2016 through 2020. Pienaar and Cillers (2016) interviewed 24 department chairpersons from different academic departments at a medium-sized, South African university. In two in-person focus group settings, participants were asked to relate and discuss real-life situations involving conflict. The authors coded the data to reveal the following themes: "(1) consequences postulated as challenges, (2) contextual challenges and, (3) challenges inherent in the role" (Pienaar \& Cillers, 2016, p. 192). Theme 1 covered situations related to the toll the job took on participant's health and career, which is a consequence of role overload, role conflict, and role strain. Theme 2 involved negative aspects of institutional culture, such as lack of trust, which describes role stress. Theme 3 encompassed several aspects of role-related problems. Participants reported being torn between their academic role and identity, and their administrative role and identity, which involves interrole conflict borne out of the divergent role expectations of faculty and administration, and role strain resulting from the chairperson's internal turmoil in choosing which roles to enact. Theme 3 also included issues of how role expectations relate to issues of power and authority. In response to their study findings, the
authors recommended a restructuring of the traditional department chairperson position to embody more positional authority, and called for increased and sustained management training for chairpersons.

Armstrong and Woloshyn (2017) individually interviewed 10 department chairpersons from a Canadian university about their roles as frontline managers and scholars. The authors coded the data and uncovered three themes, "managing position, managing people, and managing self" (p. 97). The first theme related to the role ambiguity experienced by the participants due to the complexity of their job coupled with a lack of management training. The second theme described the tensions experienced by the participants in relation to liaising with a wide varied of stakeholders. Theme three related to how taking on the chairperson position altered the participants' role identity and role status within their organization. The authors recommended formal leadership training and the establishment of support groups for chairpersons. They also highlight the need for "continued research exploring chairs' experiences, particularly large-scale and longitudinal research that examines change over time and across different contexts and personalities in order to determine the impact of external socializing forces on chairs' duties, roles, and identities" (p. 110).

Kruze (2020) individually interviewed 45 department chairpersons via telephone and meeting software from European and U.S. research-focused universities, teaching-focused universities, and technical schools about their challenges in the workplace. The author coded the data to uncover three themes, (1) task tensions, which describes balancing management with leadership, (2) organizational and role tensions, which is the balance between institutional and faculty concerns, and (3) people and relationship tension, which broadly describes the tension between responsibility and constraint. Based on these findings, the author recommended that,

Given the key role chairs play in keeping departments running smoothly, it is smart for the institution to take chair on-boarding, mentorship, and coaching more seriously and develop formal and regular opportunities for chairs' learning. At a minimum, chairs should receive basic orientation toward campus policies and practices to which they are expected to respond and uphold. (Kruze, 2020, p. 16)

In 2020, Freeman et al. telephone-interviewed 15 department chairpersons at various U.S. universities about how they approach their jobs. The authors coded the interview data to uncover four themes: "(a) managing the molecule, (b) people work vs. paperwork, (c) leadership qualities enhance performance, and (d) possessing academic seniority" (Freemen et al., 2020, p. 895). The first theme described managing working relationship with a wide variety of stakeholders who have conflicting and competing agenda. The second theme dealt with the tension between managing large amounts of bureaucratic paperwork and the demands of other people's attention. The third theme described the concept of influencing other through consensus building to meet shared goals. The fourth and final theme described establishing leadership credibility via one's own academic rank. From these data, the authors recommended that institutions of higher learning devote more resources to mentoring and training for chairpersons.

Throughout the decades since Lane (1967) and Sharma (1971) first examined the chairperson's organizational role conflict, research on this subject has consistently shown that complexity, ambiguity, and stress are constituent to the position. Though these studies did not specifically use terms such as locus of authority or division of labor, they described chairpersons' ongoing dilemmas in defining, owning, and fulfilling their duties. These studies also demonstrated that much of this role conflict is situated within the organizational structure of the institution, which can be defined as role stress, and relates to the divergent perspectives and
expectations of the collegium and bureaucracy subcultures, which can be defined as issues of role identity, role conformity, role expectation, and role strain.

## Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature on department chairperson's organizational role conflict by first describing the chairperson's central place within the organizational infrastructure of higher education. Two models were reviewed: Mintzberg's (1979) linear professional bureaucracy model and Birnbaum's (1988) nonlinear school system model. I then described two organizational subcultures, the collegium and the bureaucracy, to which the chairperson position belongs. I highlighted the differences between the collegium and the bureaucracy, which divides and confounds the responsibilities and group affiliation of the department chairperson. I reviewed the basic tenets of role theory before detailing select but representative studies on the role conflict of the department chairperson since the late 1960s. Throughout this review, I employed the three concepts of division of labor, locus of authority, and professional identity as unifying themes in linking together organizational structure, organizational culture, and role theory.

## CHAPTER 3

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study as outlined in Chapter 1 was to investigate, describe, and interpret the organizational role conflict experienced by faculty who serve as long-term department chairpersons, and those who serve in similar positions, such as long-term department heads. The study was guided by the following three research questions that collectively inform an understanding of role conflict:

1. How do long-term department chairpersons or long-term department heads describe their organizational/professional identities?
2. How do long-term department chairpersons or long-term department heads experience and navigate their faculty and department manager roles and others' expectations of them?
3. How have long-term department chairpersons or long-term department heads made sense of their faculty and manager roles and others' expectations of them over time while in the department chairperson position?

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the methodological framework I used in this study first by reviewing the qualitative paradigm as an approach to research, followed by a treatment of hermeneutic phenomenology as a form of qualitative inquiry that includes van Manen's (2015) guiding principles to enact the hermeneutic circle. From there, I describe the
eligibility and recruitment of study participants, and how I collected and managed the data for this study. I present both narrative review and Van Kaam's (Moustakas, 1994) method of hermeneutic data analysis as my two approaches in interpreting the study findings. Further, I describe the methods I used to validate my analysis, which included member checking and an audit. I close this chapter with an explanation of the general principles of researcher trustworthiness in qualitative research and my researcher perspective of this study.

## Qualitative Research Paradigm

Creswell (2013) pointed out that all qualitative methods, including phenomenology, "begins with assumptions and the use of interpretative/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 44). This approach is distinct from quantitative research methods in which a hypothesis is tested with statistical measures to "explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest" (Mills \& Gay, 2016, p. 24). It is often noted that quantitative inquiry is reductionist, "where the data are in the form of numbers" (Punch, 2014, p. 3), while qualitative inquiry is holistic and "makes little use of numbers or statistics but instead relies heavily on verbal data and subjective analysis" (Gall et al., 2002, p. 13). However, this distinction alone does little to describe the fundamental philosophical differences underpinning each form of inquiry.

To understand what distinguishes the qualitative paradigm from the quantitative requires comparison between the epistemological foundations of each approach. Quantitative inquiry is built upon epistemological realism utilizing "a methodology that gives us the confidence (indeed, the statistical confidence) to believe that we can see beyond our subjective experience" (Barnham, 2015, p. 844) towards an objective or near-objective reality (Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Denzin \& Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative research, however, privileges "multiple
perspectives from participants rather than a single reality" (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Qualitative researchers' acceptance of these multiple perspectives derives from the assumption that reality is not external to the observer (Bruzina, 2004; Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Denzin \& Lincoln, 2018; Groenewald, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Merriam \& Tisdell, 2015; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015). Hence, qualitative researchers doubt whether "objective existence can be conscious and known in subjectivity" (Husserl, 1907/2008, p. 154). In essence, the qualitative researcher eschews the necessity of limiting human subjectivity in the search for what can be known, and instead rigorously examines how reality unfolds through the perceptions of the observer and the observed (Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015).

## Phenomenology

The qualitative study of phenomenology "provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals" (Creswell, 2013, p. 46) where the phenomenon is defined as a particular object or element of human experience (Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015). The German mathematician, Husserl, is credited with developing the phenomenological paradigm in the early 20th century, having been influenced by earlier German philosophers, such as Kant and Hegel (Guignon, 2006; Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Spiegelberg, 1994). The German philosopher, Heidegger, and French existentialists, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, later expanded upon Husserl's writings (Guignon, 2006; Spiegelberg, 1994) to form the basis of phenomenological approaches that are used today (Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Guignon, 2006; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015).

As Moustakas (1994) wrote, "Husserl was concerned with the discovery of meanings and essences in knowledge" (p. 27). Hence, "the issue of idealism versus realism is resolved through phenomenological [research] methods in which the meanings and essences of phenomena are derived, not presupposed or assumed" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 46). To investigate these essences, phenomenological researchers rely on capturing rich, thick descriptions of how the targeted phenomena are experienced by the study participants themselves (Creswell, 2013; Creswell and Poth, 2017; Denzin \& Lincoln, 2018; Groenewald, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Merriam \& Tisdell, 2015; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015).

In many research methodologies, the more precise and targeted a research question, the more efficacious that question is thought to be. However, this is not the case with phenomenology (Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Denizen \& Lincoln, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015). Van Manen (2015) advised that a phenomenological researcher "must pull the reader into the question in such a way that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon" (p. 42). In framing a phenomenological investigation, Moustakas (1994) counseled the researcher to "determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (p.13). Following these guidelines, I asked participants to describe the contexts or situations that have influenced their experiences of role conflict. My focus was organizational in nature, as organizational role theory centers on the parts people play within "social systems that are preplanned, task-oriented, and hierarchical" (Biddle, 1986, p. 73).

## Hermeneutic Phenomenology

There are two basic types of phenomenological research methods (Creswell, 2013;
Laverty, 2003). The original philosophy of Husserl is called phenomenology or transcendental
phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004; Kafle, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015). When employed in research, this approach is "focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Husserl believed that "knowledge begins with experience (Erfahrung) and remains within experience" (Husserl, 1931/2013, p. 51). This distilled description of experience forms the basis of pure or transcendental phenomenology. In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenology is a method in which the researcher not only attempts to describe the data but also interprets it (Creswell, 2013;

Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Groenewald, 2004; Kafle, 2011; Laverty, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015).

Heidegger, who was a student of Husserl, first developed hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy. Influenced by existentialists, such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (Groenewald, 2004; van Manen, 2015), Heidegger believed that stopping at experience is insufficient for meaningful understanding and that detailed, rich description of an experience "is thus mediated by expression (for example: by blushing, talk, action, a work of art, a text)" (as cited in van Manen, 2015, p. 25). Heidegger highlighted the elucidatory quality of experience when he wrote that "phenomenology of Dasein [presence] is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting (Heidegger, 1933/1962, p. 62). As van Manen (2015) wrote, in explaining Heidegger's approach, "phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the "texts of life" (p. 4).

While all phenomenology involves the examination of a pre-determined lived experience, or phenomenon, researchers employing the hermeneutic lens situated their investigation within an historical and cultural context. Laverty (2003) wrote,

Pre-understanding is a structure for being in the world, according to Heidegger (1927/1962). This pre-understanding is the meanings or organization of a culture that are present before we understand and become part of our historicality of background. Preunderstanding is not something a person can step outside of or put aside, as it is understood as already being with us in the world. Heidegger went as far as to claim that nothing can be encountered without reference to a person's background understanding. Koch (1995) described this as an indissoluble unity between a person and the world. Meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences. There is a transaction between the individual and the world as they constitute and are constituted by each other (Munhall, 1989). (p. 24)

In this dissertation study, the targeted phenomenon I examined was organizational role conflict. The task I set myself was to access the study participants' experiences of this phenomenon within the institutional hierarchies and institutional cultures in which they work, and within the details of their personal narratives. Berdrow (2010) advised,

The role of department chair cannot be considered in isolation of the context within which the individual chair functions, nor can it be considered purely as a functional role without consideration of the actor carrying out those functions. This view of the role of department chair as both an actor and an agent of an institution is unique within the academic leadership literature. (p. 499)

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a methodology well suited to the study of a long-term academic frontline manager as "both an actor and an agent of an institution" (Berdrow, 2010, p. 499) because it is a method entrenched "in a natural setting sensitive to the people [participants]
and places under study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). In hermeneutic phenomenology, "theory and research are to be related to the practice of living" (van Manen, 2015, p. 15), and this "guides us back from theoretical abstractions to the reality of lived experiences" (van Manen, 2015, p. 44). I embraced a hermeneutic approach because I sought to uncover and interpret the essence of what organizational role conflict is to the study participants as a manifestation of their real world experience.

## Enacting the Hermeneutic Circle

As a way to operationalize the hermeneutical approach to phenomenology, van Manen (2015) devised six methodological principles in performing research. These are:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world,
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it,
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon,
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting,
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon,
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31) Van Manen (2015) constructed these guiding principles as recursive. In so doing, he was following Heidegger, who claimed that the process of understanding is iterative, and achieved by grasping parts of the whole in a continuous cycle called the hermeneutic circle (Guignon, 2006; Kafle, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015). In commenting on the hermeneutic circle, Gadamer (1975) claimed, "When we interpret the meaning of something we actually interpret an interpretation" (p. 68). Throughout this study, I employed the hermeneutic circle in my approach to data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and data reporting.

## Study Participants

## Eligibility

In phenomenology, "the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participant" (Hycner, 1999, p. 156). Since "data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81), I selected participants following a form of purposeful sampling called criterion sampling. The three criteria I used in the selection process were (1) participants must be tenured or tenure track faculty working at four-year or higher non-profit colleges or universities, (2) participants must have worked as department chairpersons or department heads for at least 6 consecutive years or longer, and (3) participants must be working as a department chairperson or department head at the time of their participation in this study, or within one year of their participation in this study. To allow me to focus on the research questions, I did not recruit people from the university in which I currently work, nor did I recruit people I have known or met prior to this study.

## Recruitment

In searching for prospective participants, I confined my initial search to the area in which I live, the Midwest region of the United States. However, I was open to working with participants located outside this region. Searching the online, Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), I generated a list of non-profit colleges and universities in my home state of Indiana, and the contiguous states of Kentucky, Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan. I searched the websites of each of these institutions for contact information. I then emailed college deans, associate deans, and vice presidents for academic affairs from my list of institutions to request recommendations on suitable participants. I also scanned the websites of these institutions for employee profiles. Within the confines of this
recruitment process, I took care to select individuals with as much maximum variation as possible. For the purposes of this study, maximum variation was defined as variability of discipline, gender, race, ethnicity, and the length of time, past the 6-year minimum, that a participant had occupied the chairperson or department head position. Once I had identified potential participants, I employed chain referral sampling among the participants themselves to locate additional participants.

Initial contact of prospective participants was made via email solicitation (Appendix A) to inquire about the individual's willingness to participate in a confidential interview. If no email response was forthcoming within one week of the initial email solicitation date, I then telephoned these prospective participants at their place of work (Appendix B). For those agreeing to be interviewed, I emailed an interview date/time confirmation reminder (Appendix C) and the consent form (Appendix D) two weeks prior to the interview date, and also took copies of these documents with me to the interview for reviewing and signing. I collected the signed consent forms from the participants during in-person interviews. For participants interviewed over the telephone, I sent them a self-addressed, stamped envelope with instructions to mail their signed, consent form back to me prior to the interviews.

## Data Collection

## Semi-Structured Interview

Conducting in-depth interviews of study participants is a well-established form of data collection in phenomenological investigations (Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Denzin \& Lincoln, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015). Phenomenological interviews vary in design from semi-structured to unstructured (Denzin \& Lincoln, 2018; van Manen, 2015). While being receptive to my participants' realities, I was mindful that in hermeneutic phenomenology
the "the interview process needs to be disciplined by the fundamental question(s) that prompted the need for the interview in the first place" (van Manen, 2015, p. 66). Therefore, I used a semistructured interview protocol to explore my research questions (Appendix E). Prior to field research, I tested my interview protocol by discussing the interview questions with two longterm department chairpersons at my place of employment, Indiana State University. These individuals were Dr. Virgil Sheets, Chair \& Professor, Department of Psychology, and Dr. John Conant, Professor and former Chair, Department of Economics. Though not included in my pool of study participants, their feedback proved invaluable in fine-tuning the interview protocol.

I conducted confidential, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 participants in 2019. These interviews lasted one to three hours in duration per participant, depending on each participant's availability. I interviewed four participants by telephone, and seven participants inperson at their place of work. Demographic information on each participant was gathered prior to and during these interviews.

Unlike an unstructured interview, in the semi-structured interview the researcher has a set of questions to be explored but is open "to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher" (Denscombe, 2017, p. 172), thus affording the participants room to be co-investigators with the researcher (Gadamer, 1975; van Manen, 2015) while also allowing for "a systematic and disciplined approach to the research plan and the interview itself" (Vandermause \& Fleming, 2011). Reporting my practice of affording the study participants a limited freedom in talking about their experiences, while pulling them back to my interview questions is a critical distinction for me to make, as hermeneutic phenomenologists rigorously expose their motives as a measure of their trustworthiness (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 2015). During these interviews, I adopted the qualitative
researcher's goal of encouraging "a special kind of speech event during which they [the researcher] listens for special language and other clues that reveal meaning structures informants [participants] use to understand their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 23). All interviews were audiorecorded on a password-protected tablet and mobile smartphone. I transcribed all interviews in MSWord on a secured, password-protected laptop. To anonymize the participants, I assigned each individual a pseudonym, and stripped identifying details of their institutional affiliation from the interview transcriptions.

## Field Notes and Memos

Since qualitative research "is a situated activity that locates the observer [researcher] in the world" (Creswell, 2013, p. 43), during the interviews and immediately afterwards, I created handwritten, observational field notes that captured my impressions of the interview site, the participant's body language or tone of voice, and other impressions. In the case of the telephone interviews, this information was confined to my impressions of the participants' tone of voice. I also engaged in reflective, handwritten note taking, called memoing (Miles \& Huberman, 1994, p. 69). Memos, which are "short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur" (Creswell, 2013, p. 183) to the researcher aid in the capturing of rich, thick data and serve to uncover the researcher's reactions and state of mind during data analysis (Merriam, 2009; Merriam \& Tisdell, 2015). While observational field notes help add dimension to the interview data (Creswell, 2013), memoing assists the researcher in engaging in the deep and ongoing process of self-reflection that is required by the hermeneutic process (Denzin \& Lincoln, 2018).

## Saturation

In phenomenological research, examining the targeted phenomenon typically requires a smaller number of participants than other types of qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). While
employing recursion, van Manen (2015) and Gadamer (1975) counseled the researcher to think deeply about deciding when data collection and interpretation is such that saturation is achieved. Saturation is a recursive process in which
data collection is followed by analysis. Analysis leads to concepts. Concepts generate questions. Questions lead to more data collection so that the researcher can learn more about those concepts. This circular process continues until the research reaches the point of saturation. (Corbin, 2015, p. 135)

Creswell (2013) and Polkinghorne (1989) recommended 8 to 10 participants as being sufficient to reach saturation. Morse (1994) suggested a minimum number of 6 participants. I worked towards saturation by employing van Manen's (2015) six principles to enact the recursive hermeneutic circle, as informed by Gadamer (1975). I defined saturation as the emergence of a "consensus across views expressed" (Turner et al., 2002, p. 298) of the study participants. Saturation in this study was achieved after I had interviewed the eighth participant. However, since I had 3 additional interviews scheduled, I continued the interviews for a total 11 study participants.

## Data Analysis

Crowther et al. (2017) explained that in hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers "do not claim that there is only one way of working with data or one possible (or best) meaning of the data," and that, because of this, the hermeneutic approach embraces "myriad ways of working with data" (p. 829). Vandermause and Fleming (2011) explained that in hermeneutic phenomenological research, "the interviewer seeks to uncover what it means to be as it shows up or reveals itself through story" (p. 369). Due to the hermeneutic imperative of investigating study
participants' experiences as "the text of life" (van Manen, 2015), I divided my data finding and data analysis into two parts (1) narrative review and (2) theme building.

## Narrative Review

Phenomenological research is narrative in nature (Biddle, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). As such, it is "best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single individual or the lives of a small number of individuals" (Creswell \& Poth, 2017, p. 148). Since "the narrative study tells the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context" (Creswell \& Poth, 2017, p. 150), I drafted narratives, called stories, of each participant based on their interview data. In addition, I compiled details of the study participants' personal, professional, and institutional characteristics to add further dimension to their stories. I present these study findings in Chapter 4. Because the hermeneutic approach relates study participants to historical and cultural backgrounds (Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Laverty, 2003), I then reviewed the participants' stories and characteristics to situate these data within a wider historical, cultural, and institutional context. Specifically, I employed an established technique of textural analysis called comparing and contrasting to explore how participants described themselves, their duties, and their place within their institution's hierarchy to generate "a discussion of the connections, comparisons, commonalities, and contrasts" (Melzer, 2011, p. 461) between them. This analysis is presented in Chapter 6.

## Theme Building

Creswell and Poth (2017) asserted that, "An ending for phenomenology is a descriptive passage that discusses the essence of the experience for individuals incorporating "what" they have experienced and "how" they experienced it." (p. 157). Koch (1995) asserted that data
analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology is "a dialectic between the preunderstandings of the research process, the interpretive framework, and the sources of information" (p. 835). This explains the recursive quality of van Manen's (2015) six methodological principles, as the researcher employs a process of engaging in "a hermeneutic circle of understanding" (Laverty, 2003, p. 21). In a similar vein, I employed a phenomenological data analysis plan modified by Moustakas (1994), called the Van Kaam method (p. 120). Bearing in mind that data analysis using the hermeneutic circle involves recursive "reading, reflective writing and interpretation in a rigorous fashion" (Kafle, 2011, p. 194), each step of the Van Kaam method, as modified by Moustakas, moves from phenomenological theme building to a composite description of the whole (Moustakas, 1994). These steps are:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping. The researcher first lists preliminary groupings of expressions for comparison from the data collected during the study.
2. Reduction and elimination. From these comparisons, the researcher moves on to reduction through the elimination of expressions that do not contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it.
3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents. From here, the researcher clusters these general themes and applies labels to them.
4. Identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application. At this stage in the process, the researcher checks the identification of the themes through validation.
5. Individual textural description. Using the themes, the researcher creates an individual textual description for each study participant, including exemplary verbatim quotes of the transcribed interviews.
6. Individual structural description. The researcher then creates an individual structural description of the experience for each study participant based on the individual textual description employing imaginative variation. Imaginative variation is the researcher's use of her imagination of what is possible by intentionally varying her frame of reference to the data by arguing against the themes, employing reversals of perspective, and allowing herself to step outside of her intellectual and emotional comfort zones to consider varying meanings in the data.
7. Textural-structural description. The researcher then creates a textual-structural description of the meanings of the experience, incorporating the themes for each study participant.
8. Composite description. From these textual-structural descriptions, the researcher develops a composite that incorporates the meanings and essences of the experience representative of the entire group of participants. (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 120-121)

While employing the modified Van Kaam method in my treatment of the data, I developed themes using Dedoose, a web-based coding software tool. Specifically, I coded copies of interview transcripts and my notes to derive overarching, emergent themes describing the essence of the shared experiences of participants' roles and role conflict. I present these study findings in Chapter 5. I then analyzed the narratives and themes through the lens of role theory. This analysis is presented in Chapter 6.

## Validation

I employed two forms of validation: (1) member checking and (2) an audit. In member checking, participants are given the opportunity to offer feedback on study findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln \& Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Miles \& Huberman, 1994). Many qualitative researchers wholly embrace member checking as a way to demonstrate the validity of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Merriam, 2009; Merriam \& Tisdell, 2015; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015). However Ashworth (1993), while advocating for member checking, cautions researchers to be circumspect about the process "since the 'atmosphere of safety' that would allow the individual [participant] to lower his or her defenses, cease 'presentation,' and act in open candour if this is possible, is hardly likely to be achieved in the research encounter" (p. 15). Thus, member checking demands that the researcher be forthright with her study participants, dedicated in recognizing, trusting, and explaining her own insights and rigorous in checking and rechecking her own thought processes.

I asked each participant to review my interpretation of their individual stories by sending each of them a draft of their story and the three tables describing all participants' personal, professional, and institutional characteristics presented in Chapter 4. In collecting this feedback, 7 of the 11 participants elected to participate in checking their individual stories, while 4 participants elected to refrain from member checking. Of the 7 participants who responded, all endorsed their stories, with 1 participant asking for minor grammatical adjustments. Four months after this event, I also shared a general outline of the themes presented in Chapter 5 with the 7 participants who had elected to member check their stories. Five of these participants responded with an endorsement of the outline of the themes, while the rest refrained from member checking
this material. In addition, to maintain transparency and authenticity the anonymous department chairperson quoted in the preface to this dissertation read and authorized the preface draft. The administrator cited in the Department Chairperson versus Department Head section of the Chapter 2 literature review, Dr. Dennis George, Associate Dean, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at Western Kentucky University, read and authorized the reference made of my telephone conversation with him.

The second validation technique, the audit, further establishes credibility of research findings. While participants can only respond to the data in relation to their own experiences, an auditor can consider the study in its entirety. In assessing the quality of the research, Creswell (2013) explained, "the auditor examines whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data" (p. 252). This is accomplished by the examination of a detailed audit trail, which is a transparent description of the entire research process, from the start of data collection to the reporting of findings. The auditor must be a subject expert other than the principal researcher (Creswell, 2013; Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln \& Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Miles \& Huberman, 1994). In this study, the auditor was my dissertation committee chairperson, Dr. C. Jack Maynard.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided categories that help to shape the development of an audit trail, this being,

- raw data. These include written field notes and the interview transcriptions,
- data reduction and analysis products. These are extrapolations such as condensed notes, summaries, and theoretical notes,
- data reconstruction and synthesis products. These include the structures of categories such as themes, definitions, and relationships, as well as an integration of concepts, relationships, and interpretations,
- materials relating to intentions and dispositions. These include personal notes such as reflexive notes. (pp. 319-310)

Guided by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) general categories, my online Dedoose account was made available to Dr. Maynard, who had access to view the anonymized raw data and my coding of these data. As a part of this transparency, I met with Dr. Maynard to explain and discuss my technical and intellectual processes in coding these data.

## Trustworthiness

Van Manen's (2015) stance on data analysis as being holistic rather than prescriptive provides a useful guide in judging the rigor of data analysis. Van Manen (2015) advised, "Too often theme analysis is understood as an unambiguous and fairly mechanical application of some frequency count or coding of selected terms in transcripts or texts, or some other break-down of the content of protocol or documentary material" (p. 104). However, since the process of hermeneutic phenomenology involves "the use of imagination, the hermeneutic circle and attention to language and writing" (Laverty, 2003, p. 21), scholars have created standards of rigor specific to this research paradigm. Van Manen has been influential in establishing requirements in judging the trustworthiness of qualitative research that are well suited to hermeneutic phenomenology (Creswell, 2013; Laverty, 2003). Van Manen's requirements involve how the researcher's analysis demonstrates (1) the researcher's genuine care for participants and deep involvement in the participants' experiences and (2) the quality, richness, and depth of the report writing to express the essence of the participants' experience. In a similar
vein, Polkinghorne (1989) presented four characteristics that assist the reader in judging the trustworthiness of phenomenological description and analysis as (1) the richness and clarity of the writing, (2) the ability of the researcher to draw the reader in, (3) the ability of the researcher to describe concepts that are relatable to the reader and, (4) report writing that is graceful, elegant, and sympathetic and respectful to study participants. In drafting this dissertation, I repeatedly employed van Manen's (2015) and Polkinghorne's (1989) checklists as a selfregulation tool to reflect upon and focus my thinking and writing. This process was elemental to my research methodology.

## Researcher Perspective

Qualitative research employs established scientific data collection and data analysis techniques (Bogdan \& Biklen, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Creswell \& Poth, 2017; Denzin \& Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln \& Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Merriam \& Tisdell, 2015) that rely on the steadfastness of the researcher to establish authenticity and reliability which is employed in evaluating the credibility of study findings (Bogdan \& Biklen, 2011; Creswell, 2013; DeWalt \& DeWalt, 2018; Kafle, 2011, Merriam, 2009; Merriam \& Tisdell, 2015). Unlike quantitative investigative approaches that encourage the researcher to distance themselves from data collection and data analysis (Bogdan \& Biklen, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002; Philips \& Burbules, 2000), the qualitative researcher literally becomes a "key instrument" (Creswell, 2013, p. 45) in the design of the study.

As van Manen (2015) noted, hermeneutic phenomenology is not conducted "in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence" (van Manen, 2015, p. 31). In phenomenological studies especially
"the researcher usually explores his or her own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of experience and in part to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). To help establish my authenticity, uncover my biases, and describe my affinity with the study participants I disclose the following information about myself as a reflection of my research methodology.

## Professional Identity

I am the first generation of my family to attend college, having earned the terminal degree in librarianship, which is a master's degree accredited by the American Library Association. I am currently employed at a public, Midwestern university. Here, I work as a faculty member at the rank of librarian, a status that is organizationally identical to that of full professor. My dual identity as an academic librarian and tenured faculty member is both complementary and oppositional, as I inhabit an organizational role and professional identity considered a professional-level staff position to some, and a privileged, academic vocation to others.

Although the proposition of making librarians organizational and political equals to the professoriate in the United States can be traced back to the early 20th century (Henry, 1911), librarians only began earning faculty status in the 1970s (AAUP, 2015a). In spite of this, such status has been controversial (Bernstein, 2009; Gillum, 2010; Krompart \& DiFelice, 1987; Meskill \& Meskill, 1975). Today, only one-half of the universities in the United States categorized as Carnegie research institutions offer faculty status to librarians (Gilman \& Lindquist, 2008; Walters, 2016). For academic librarians with faculty status, there can be difficulties in being accepted as academics. Librarians are not generally perceived as owning the traditional, educative role in higher education. Instead, they are often treated as outsiders by the
collegium and the bureaucracy subcultures (Fleming-May \& Douglass, 2014; Mackey \& Jacobson, 2005; Shiflett, 1981).

As an academic librarian, I have enjoyed and benefited from the privileges of faculty status and the goodwill and friendship of many teaching faculty and university administrators. However, I also interpret some behaviors of the collegium and the bureaucracy as marginalizing toward me specifically, and towards librarians in general. These behaviors are intermittent but pervasive. I cannot gauge the intersectional effects of my race and age on some of these situations. However, I do see my librarian role as a strong contributing factor in such situations. As I recognize that librarians with faculty status belong to a very small subculture within the larger academic community in the United States (Hill, 2005), I adopt an intentionally detached attitude in negotiating my faculty status. This allows me the emotional distance I require to focus successfully on my work. Nevertheless, my status as a nontraditional faculty member results in my having great affinity with the faculty community at large while also having issues of alienation from that same group.

## Teaching Experience

Teaching classes for credit is not automatically a part of an academic librarian's duties. However, there are academic librarians who do teach classes on behalf of their employer. While I do not experience my life as a fulltime instructor, I have taught undergraduate and graduate courses as an adjunct instructor. I have had many of my own teaching challenges and triumphs, and I relate to the stories faculty tell of their teaching experiences. I appreciate their perspectives on curriculum development, classroom and program assessment, and the allocation of institutional resources. Moreover, my faculty status as an academic librarian requires me to engage in the same service activities as the general professoriate. Consequently, I have worked
alongside fulltime teaching faculty on many governance, administrative, and ad hoc committees dealing with the teaching mission of the university. Because of these experiences, I acknowledge the expertise, hard work, dedication, rewards, and challenges of teaching in higher education.

## Administrative Experience

Another dimension of my experience that resonates with this study is my work as a frontline manager in the business sector. I have supervised professional and clerical staff in research centers and libraries for large, multinational corporations. I have first-hand experience of how the corporate environment unabashedly centralizes authority to make efficient use of resources, standardizes processes to preserve resources and minimize mission creep, and adheres to merit-based promotion in opposition to seniority. These experiences do influence my opinions of academe. While I value the autonomy and creativity I currently enjoy as a faculty member, I am mindful of the societal and economic challenges currently facing higher education. I agree with Altbach and Finkelstein's (1997/2013) characterization of the academic profession's "innate conservatism [which] has protected the universities from fads and fashions, but at the same time has made it quite difficult for academic institutions to adapt to changing circumstances" ( p . viii). Because of this conservatism, I sometimes find my fellow faculty, including library faculty, naïve or uncaring about the educational marketplace in the United States.

In the public university where I work, I have served as chairperson of two library departments, and as acting chairperson of a third. My experience of organizational role conflict in an academic environment mirrors that of all department chairpersons as reported in the literature. In these chairperson roles, I experienced role conflict when balancing department concerns with broader institutional goals, and had feelings of alienation when library colleagues did not understand my responsibilities and challenges as a department level, frontline manager.

Having enacted the role of a faculty member, I harbor a genuine affinity for the deliberate consensus building of faculty governance and distributed leadership. However, while managing in the same environment, I weigh this perspective against an acute awareness of the personal responsibility that makes me desirous for a centralization of resources and the temporal efficiency of top-down management.

Beyond the chairperson position, I have had a glimpse further up the chain of command in higher education. I worked as an assistant library director at a small, private college where the librarians did not have faculty status. I felt that the chain of command within that academic library was almost as top-down and linear as had been in my corporate positions, and I believe that this was due to my lack of faculty status. In addition, at the university where I currently work, I have also served as acting associate dean of library services. This experience has allowed me to witness and participate in a subculture of upper administration previously unknown to me.

## Conflicting Perspectives

Because of my time spent as a corporate researcher and corporate manager, faculty insider and faculty outsider, adjunct instructor, and academic administrator, my perspective of organizational behavior and role conflict in academe is conflicted and complex. However, these experiences have led to my desire to investigate role conflict in academe. In learning of the history of higher education in the United States, I agree with those who believe that deep-seated resistance to change is "ingrained in the American collegiate and university tradition, as over three hundred years of [higher education] history demonstrated" (Rudolph, 1962/1990, p. 491). Yet in spite of such resistance, I believe that organizational change is needed. In facing the challenges of the 21 st century, I suspect that new models of academic administration may need to be developed for all levels of the university hierarchy. However, I do not know what these
models should be. While I see role conflict as being a part of many positions in higher education, my desire to focus on the department chairperson is influenced by my personal experience of this complex and illusive position, and by my belief that higher education is "more dependent than ever on chairpersons possessing superb managerial skills-chairs who are well able to implement university policies and directives, and affect change in order to assist institutions reaching their objectives amidst all the internal and external challenges" (Pienaar \& Cilliers, 2016, p. 186).

## Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the four research questions that guided this study on the role conflict experienced by academics who serve as long-term department chairpersons or department heads in higher education. I then reviewed the qualitative paradigm as an approach to research, followed by a treatment of hermeneutic phenomenology as a form of qualitative inquiry used in this study that included van Manen's (2015) guiding principles for enacting the hermeneutic circle. From there, I described the eligibility and recruitment of study participants, and how I collected and managed the data for this study. I presented both narrative review and Van Kaam's (Moustakas, 1994) method of hermeneutic data analysis as my two approaches in interpreting the study findings. Further, I described the methods I used to validate my analysis, which included member checking and an audit. I closed this chapter with an explanation of the general principles of researcher trustworthiness in qualitative research and my researcher perspective of this study.

## CHAPTER 4

## FINDINGS I

In this chapter, I presented the first part of the study findings by narrating each participants' individual story of how they described themselves, their role as frontline manager, and their pathway to the manager position. I also include select details of participants' personal, professional, and institutional characteristics to help situate their stories within a larger historical, cultural, and institutional context. All 11 participants were interviewed in 2019 and are long-term frontline managers, having occupied their respective administrative positions for 6 years or longer at the time of their interview, or within one year of their interview. Every participant holds a terminal degree and is tenured. All participants teach within their academic departments. Participant demographics vary by gender, race, age, disciplinary expertise, length of academic career, rank, institution type, and position title.

## Participants' Characteristics

## Personal and Professional Characteristics

As indicated in Table 3, one gender dominates in this cohort of participants, as nine are male and two, Beth and Rose, are female. Further, this cohort is not racially diverse. All are White, with the exception of one Black person, John. Participants range in age from 39 to 66 years. Four participants teach in a social science discipline, six teach in a STEM discipline, and one teaches in a humanities discipline. The total number of years each participant has worked as
a fulltime academic ranges from 10 to 36 . Two participants, Beth and Ted, are associate professors, while the remaining nine participants are full professors.

## Table 3

Participants' Personal and Professional Characteristics

|  | Personal |  |  |  | Professional |  |  |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Name | Gender | Race | Age |  | Discipline | Career (years) | Current Rank |
| Abe | M | W | 61 |  | social science | 36 | professor |
| Beth | F | W | 66 |  | social science | 22 | associate professor |
| Clark | M | W | 39 | STEM | 11 | professor |  |
| Dave | M | W | 57 | STEM | 28 | professor |  |
| John | M | B | 49 | STEM | $20+$ | professor |  |
| Luke | M | W | 45 | STEM | 14 | professor |  |
| Mark | M | W | 65 | humanities | 34 | professor |  |
| Paul | M | W | 60 | social science | 32 | professor |  |
| Rose | F | W | 54 | social science | 25 | professor |  |
| Scott | M | W | 57 | STEM | 30 | professor |  |
| Ted | M | W | 41 | STEM | 10 | associate professor |  |
| Note. $\mathrm{M}=$ male, $\mathrm{F}=$ female, $\mathrm{W}=$ White, $\mathrm{B}=$ Black, STEM $=$ science, technology, engineering, and |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

mathematics. Career indicates total number of years as a fulltime academic during entire career.

Table 4 lists participants' administrative position titles and the corresponding number of years they have served in these positions at the time of their interview. Participants fall into four general groups (1) five long-term department chairpersons, Abe, Beth, Clark, Paul, and Rose, (2) three long-term department heads, John, Scott, and Ted, (3) a long-term department head who had been a long-term department chairperson at another institution, Mark, and, (4) two fulltime administrators who had recently worked as long-term department chairpersons.

## Table 4

Participants' Position Titles and Number of Years in Position

|  | Abe | Beth | Clark | Dave | John $^{1}$ | Luke | Mark $^{1}$ | Paul | Rose | Scott | Ted |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Chair | 25 | 17 | 7 | 15 | - | 7 | 7 | 6 | 10 | - | - |
| Head | - | - | - | - | 8 | - | 6 | - | - | 12 | 7 |
| Int. Dean | - | - | - | 0.5 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Div. Dir. | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - |

Note: Chair = department chairperson, Head = department head, Int. Dean = interim dean, Div. Dir.
$=$ division director.
${ }^{1}$ John and Mark have work experience as associate deans.

Belonging to this fourth group is Dave, who served as a long-term department chairperson for 15 years before serving six months as an interim dean at the same institution. Also in this group is Luke, who served seven years as a long-term department chairperson before his institution abolished academic departments and replaced them with academic divisions. As part of this reorganization, Luke became a division director. In addition, two of the study participants, John and Mark, have work experience as associate deans (Table 4).

## Institutional Characteristics

Participants work at universities and colleges located in various parts of Illinois, Indiana, and Massachusetts. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education developed the Carnegie classifications used to describe participants' institutions in Table 5. I used the Commission's online tool (Carnegie, 2017b) to verify the classification of each participant's institution. The Commission assigns the basic classification to institutions based on metrics of research activity, which includes the following categories,

- R1: Doctoral universities with very high research activity,
- R2: Doctoral universities with high research activity,
- M1: Master's colleges and universities, larger programs,
- M2: Master's colleges and universities, medium programs,
- M3: Master's colleges and universities, smaller programs,
- 4-year: Baccalaureate colleges. (Carnegie, 2017a)


## Table 5

## Participants' Institutional Characteristics

| Name | Carnegie Classification |  |  | Department Makeup-Faculty Positions |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Basic | Control | Size | Tenured | Tenure Track | Contingent |
| Abe ${ }^{1}$ | M3 | private | small | 3.5 | 1 | 2 |
| Beth | M3 | private | small | 6 | 0 | 12 |
| Clark | M2 | private | small | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Dave | M1 | public | medium | 10 | 1 | 4 |
| John | 4-year | private | small | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| Luke ${ }^{2}$ | R1 | public | large | 12 | 3 | 50 |
| Mark | R1 | private | large | 18 | 2 | 70 |
| Paul | R2 | public | large | 11 | 3 | 6 |
| Rose | M3 | private | small | 4 | 1 | 25 |
| Scott | 4-year | private | small | 7 | 4 | 0 |
| Ted | 4 -year | private | small | 6 | 5 | 1 |

Note. Contingent faculty = non-tenure track faculty, postdocs, teaching assistants, lab assistants, and research assistants. Department makeup count includes participant. Department count includes fulltime and part-time positions. Institutional classification from Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education Institution. Center for Postsecondary Research. Copyright 2017. ${ }^{1}$ Abe's department shares a fulltime faculty position with another department.
${ }^{2}$ Luke's department was replaced with a division. The department makeup count for Luke refers to his current division.

As indicated in Table 5, three participants, Luke, Mark, and Paul, work at research institutions. Five participants, Abe, Beth, Clark, Dave, and Rose, work at master's level
institutions. Three participants, John, Scott, and Ted, work at 4-year colleges. Each institution's control in Table 5 describes its main source of funding according to its Carnegie classification (Carnegie, 2017a). Three participants, Dave, Luke, and Paul, work at public institutions. The remaining eight participants work at private institutions. The number of degree-seeking students at the bachelor's level or higher indicates the size of each participants' institution. Carnegie established the size categories of (1) small as 1,000-2,999 students, (2) medium as 3,000-9,999 students and, (3) large as 10,000 students or greater (Carnegie, 2017c). Three participants, Luke, Mark, and Paul, work at large institutions. One participants, Dave, works at a medium sized institution. The remaining seven participants work at small institutions.

The department makeup data in Table 5 were collected during each participant's interview and indicates the number of tenured and tenure track faculty members working in the participant's academic department at the time of their interview. Also included is the number of filled contingent positions in the participant's department at the time of their interview. Contingent positions includes fulltime and part-time non-tenure track faculty, postdocs, teaching assistants, lab assistants, and research assistants. As was expected, department size is positively correlated to institution size. Mark, who works at a large R1 institution, is responsible for 90 academic positions, while Clark, who works at a small, M2 institution, is responsible for five faculty positions.

## Participants' Stories


#### Abstract

Abe's Story Abe is a 61-year-old White male who has been a faculty member for 36 years, and is a full professor. He is an expert in a social science discipline, and works at a small private, M3 institution that he described as, "a teaching institution with a strong, liberal arts tradition." Abe


earned tenure in 1994. As department chairperson, Abe reports directly to the chief academic officer at his institution. He became a chairperson in 1991, before being tenured, and served as chairperson for 17 years until 2008. In 2008, he temporarily vacated the position to set up a new program for his institution. However, it had been understood in his department that he would resume the role of chairperson after completing the project, which he did in 2011. Abe noted that as he was working on the new program, several people in the department rotated through the interim chairperson role while he supported them by continuing to maintain many of the activities he had performed as department chairperson. "This is a small institution," Abe explained, "and we all pull together." Since 2011, Abe has served for eight years as department chairperson, making his total time in the position to be 25 years at the time of his interview.

Abe's immediate predecessor drafted him into the position of department chairperson. Abe shared,

The previous chair, who was one of my mentors, thought I was the one for it and recruited me for the position. They wanted to retire, and they pretty much insisted. I decided to do it because, basically, it needed to be done. To be honest, it was better to put up with the pain of being a chair than to have a bad chair.

Abe values his department colleagues, referring several times during his interview to his deep appreciation for them. "Part of the reason I can do so much," he noted, "is because I've got some very, very good faculty. We have very good communication." His department is made up of three tenured faculty members, including Abe, and a tenured faculty member who works halftime in Abe's department, and halftime in another department. There is also one pretenured faculty member on the tenure track, and two fulltime continuing lecturers.

Abe envisions his responsibilities as department chairperson as something that does not force his faculty identity into the background. When asked how he would describe his job to an outsider, he explained,

I'd first make it clear that being a chair is on top of my traditional faculty duties. I still teach. I am a regular faculty member. I'm involved in all the things that go along with being a regular faculty member. On top of that, I'm responsible for the administration of this academic area, and all the majors and graduate programs that are under it. In considering his race and gender, Abe does not see either as significantly affecting his role as a department chairperson at his institution. However, with regards to a more holistic concept of diversity, he explained that although he believes that a team, such as an academic department, is more effective and healthy if its members share a common vision and purpose, it is advantageous to embrace diversity. Abe noted,

I truly believe that my job as chair is to see to it that my students graduate with a good education. And the people are most responsible for that are the people who teach in my department. I feel like I can directly influence that somewhat as a faculty member, because I do have the students for my classes, so I get my licks in. But in the end, our students' educational experience depends on the people I put in front of them. The best thing I can do is get together people with a diversity of teaching styles, and a variety of backgrounds and experiences so that the students aren't exposed to just more of the same. That's what it comes down to. If you can bring together a good team, and you can keep together a good team, it makes the job a lot easier.

When Abe was asked if his thinking of the department chairperson's role has changed over time he responded that, outside of learning the job and the routines associated with it, the
change he has witnessed is not the role of the chairperson in and of itself, but the increasing demands placed on everyone in higher education. To illustrate his point, he cited the greater accountability placed on institutions by outside agencies. Abe explained,

Over the years assessment has become a much more prevalent priority. I think that's because of accreditation. We don't have problems with that. But HLC (Higher Learning Commission) squeezes the institution, the institution squeezes the administration, and so on down the line.

Although Abe said that he has had fleeting thoughts of stepping down as chairperson during difficult moments, he has never seriously considered doing so. He does believe that everyone from his department could handle the job because, as he said, "I'm blessed with some really good people, and some of them have come from administrative positions at other institutions. But the others don't want to do it." Abe indicated, however, that he is beginning to groom a willing successor from his department who he hopes will eventually take on the role of chairperson for that time when he does transition out of the role.

## Beth's Story

Beth is a 66-year-old White female who has been a faculty member for 22 years and is an associate professor. She is an expert in a social science discipline, and works at a small private, M3 institution. Beth earned tenure in 2005. In her capacity as department chairperson, she reports directly to the chief academic officer at her institution. She became department chairperson in 2002, before being tenured. At the time of her interview, Beth had served in the position for the last 17 years. Beth's department is comprised of six tenured faculty members, including herself. There are also two fulltime lecturers, one person in a fulltime, visiting position, and nine part time adjuncts in the department.

Beth's department colleagues recruited her into the position of chairperson while she was on the tenure track. She explained,

I had been here for two years and we found out that the person who had chaired the department was leaving. Everybody loved them. They was very smart, very efficient, and very kind. But they were leaving. Two people in my department went to campus administration and said that they wanted me, and administration was in favor of it. Now, I was not tenured yet. I was not that experienced. But I realized that, behind the scenes, most of the folks in the department had their minds made up on me. I was completely dumbfounded because I was not vying for the position. As a matter of fact, one of the things you often hear is that people who desperately want to be in positions of authority often shouldn't be. Well, we had a department meeting to decide what we were going to do about the new chair, and everybody was in agreement that I should do it.

Beth wears her administrative authority lightly, preferring to see herself more as a facilitator, organizer, and coordinator rather than a supervisor. She believes that this is one reason why the faculty members in her department continue to want her as their chairperson. In her department she explains, "We all ask each other for advice. We really do work as a team." However, she does understand that even in the highly collegial environment in which she works, others may see her differently than how she sees herself. Beth shared,

There's this thing in academe about there being a division between administrators and faculty, if you want to think about it like that. Here, if I had to say where I identify, I strongly identify as faculty. I don't really identify myself as an administrator. Not too long ago I was chatting with one of my colleagues across the hall and I said, "Oh, I never
could be an administrator," and they said, "You are an administrator. You're a department chair. That makes you an administrator." "Oh yeah," I said, and we laughed. Beth described her institution as a special place of support and collegiality. She noted that,

I'm lucky that I feel very close with everyone in our department. We all have our own individual quirks, but I truly love all of them, and we get along very well. I've said many times about everybody here that I have worked with, administrators, other departments, or our own department, that we all truly have the best interest of the students at heart. Now, sometimes people have different ideas about how to go about things. Occasionally I will see people argue. But when the arguing's over, I see them patch things up.

In working at a small, private institution, Beth spends a great deal of her time and energy maximizing department resources to cover a large suite of programs and majors. She has exploited her institution's strong culture of collaboration by collaborating with other departments to offer multidisciplinary programs to enrich students' lives, and keep her institution competitive. Beth explained,

The conversations I have with campus administration and other chairs touches on us being more than managers; that we have to be leaders. Leadership is a huge part of our institutional mission. Management just means getting the reports done on time and making sure that people do their thing, like faculty teaching the classes or ordering the textbooks, and students completing assignments. Leadership is more about setting goals and looking towards the future. A large part of our conversations here revolves around how we can prepare and educate students for careers that may not even exist today.

In terms of her race and its influence on others' expectations of her, Beth responded that at her current institution, "I definitely do not feel that any special expectations have been placed on me due to my race. But then, we haven't had a lot of racial diversity here, except for the last couple of years." In terms of gender, Beth explained that her care for the students takes on a nurturing tone. While she believes that men can be nurturing, she sees this as being often considered a gendered characteristic. "Students sometimes see me as a mother figure," she said.

When Beth was asked if her thinking of the department chairperson's role has changed over time, she responded that, "It's expanded. It never contracts; it always expands. The institution's given me more to do. But every faculty would say that, not just me." Beth sees these increasing responsibilities as being connected to her institution offering more programs and majors, and increasing demands related to assessment, recruitment, and fund raising.

Because of burnout, Beth did talk with a department colleague about taking over her position as chairperson, and shared this proposition with her dean. This occurred, as Beth described it, "a few years ago." That plan, however, fell through because of her colleague's sudden unavailability. Beth continues to serve as chairperson out of a deep sense of duty and because no one else in the department is prepared to take on the role. In spite of this, she explains that she still derives satisfaction from serving her institution as both a department chairperson and a faculty member.

## Clark's Story

Clark is a 39 -year-old White male who has been a faculty member for 11 years. He is a full professor. Clark is an expert in a STEM discipline, and works at a small private, M2 institution. He earned tenure in 2016. As a department chairperson, Clark reports directly to a
dean. He became a chairperson in 2011, before being tenured. He has served in the position for the last 7 years.

Clark's journey from a newly hired assistant professor to department chairperson was swift. The department in which Clark works was once entirely populated by senior faculty members with decades of experience. Prior to Clark's appointment as chairperson, the department was managed by a chairperson who had been in the position for about 25 years. These faculty members, including the department chairperson, planned to retire over the course of a two-year period. This meant that the institution would eventually be faced with an academic department of pretenured, new faculty hires. One of these new hires was Clark. As he described it,

Technically, I wasn't hired in as a chair. But I had served three years [as a faculty member] elsewhere, so I had three years experience over colleagues who came in fresh out of grad school. I'm an alum from here as well, so I had some connections. The senior department faculty were very much, "We need to get him back, and he needs to be the next chair." They thought of me in that way in the hiring process.

Clark went on to explain, "So I had one year as a faculty member here before starting as the chair in my second year, which would have been in my fifth year of being an academic." Clark views himself as a department chairperson who is more of a coordinator and facilitator rather than a supervisor. He explains, "I'm not the administration. Even though I have administrative roles, I'm very much a faculty member. So I'm kind of a go-between with the department and the dean."

Clark's department consists of four tenured faculty members, including Clark. There is also one part-time adjunct. Clark sees his department as collegial and cooperative. He described
the distinction he makes between fulfilling his routine responsibilities and his department's collaborative decision-making when he noted,

We are a small department and are mostly peers. It's not my attitude that I'm in charge, per se. It's just that I'm the one who needs to do a lot of the paperwork. And there are some not-so-fun things that come up that somebody's got to deal with. Emails come in, somebody wants their course transferred, whatever, and I deal with this. Ultimately, decisions do have to be made. But when it comes to things that affect my peers personally and directly, we sit down, talk through it, and try to reach some kind of understanding. It's not just me saying that we have to do something because I say we have to.

In considering his race and gender, Clark sees his small department of White males as homogenous. Because of this, he does not believe that his race or gender has significantly affected his role as a department chairperson. He noted, "We're all the same, and we really haven't had to hire anybody new within the last several years." When Clark was asked if his thinking of the department chairperson's role has changed over time he responded that, aside from learning the job, he has been guided by knowledge gained from working at another institution. He explained,

I think what changes is just knowing better how to do things within the role. Having three years' experience elsewhere, and seeing how that worked as opposed to having to work here, it's just being able to see that it's different because the structure is different. How the chair ran things where I was before seemed to go really well. That environment was more of a hierarchical, chain-of-command kind of place. There still is that here, but less so. Where I was at before, even though the whole university seemed structured in that
way, our department seemed unique in being more collaborative. And I felt that this seems to work, where people have ownership of things, and people can contribute. In spite of deriving satisfaction from the role, Clark would not be opposed to having someone else in the department rotate into the chairperson position. Yet no one else is interested in doing so. Another department colleague stepped into the role of interim chairperson when Clark took a semester-long leave of absence. However, that person is unwilling to take on the chairperson role once again. As Clark explained, "He doesn't want to do it. He feels that the work isn't worth it."

## Dave's Story

Dave is a 57 -year-old White male who has been a faculty member for 28 years, and is a full professor. He is an expert in a STEM discipline, and works at a medium-sized pubic, M1 institution. Dave earned tenure in 2004, the same year he became a department chairperson. As a chairperson, Dave reported directly to a dean. However, in 2019, after serving as chairperson for 15 consecutive years, he temporarily vacated the position to serve as the interim dean of his college. As he serves in this temporary administrative position, a college colleague serves as interim chairperson in his stead.

At the time of his interview, Dave had been in the interim dean position for six months. However, he understood that this study pertains to his experiences as a department chairperson, and during the interview, he was mindful of making distinctions between his role as an interim dean versus his role as a chairperson. During his interview, Dave focused his responses on his work as a chairperson.

Dave's academic department consists of 10 tenured faculty members, including himself. There is also one pretenured, tenure track faculty member, and four adjunct faculty. Dave explained what led him to the chairperson position.

My predecessor had been chair for between 25 to 30 years. We have a history of longserving department chairs. They were taking a sabbatical, and were going to retire shortly thereafter. They came to me one day and said, "I think you have the personality and organizational skills to do it." I really had not thought of doing it beforehand. So the previous chair put the seed in my mind of doing it. I talked with some other chairs, and thought I'd take a shot at it. I was appointed for a 3-year term, and then a 5-year term, and then another 5-year term, and etcetera.

In considering his gender and race, Dave explained that he did not believe that either has affected his work or the expectations placed on him as a department chairperson. As a man, he noted that there are women department chairpersons at his institution. As someone identifying as White, he recognized that, "We don't have any African American department chairs in our college." When Dave was asked if his thinking of the chairperson's role has changed over time, he cited three separate issues. The first issue is increasing trends in accountability, and the accompanying growth of bureaucratic structure and administrative complexity. Dave noted, I will say, and I think all the department chairs would agree with me, that the amount of paperwork responsibilities and reports that department chairs have been asked to do has increased significantly over time. And sometimes we'll be asked for one thing, and then a month will go by, and we're asked for virtually the same thing maybe packaged slightly differently. It's exactly the same thing. It's almost as if we could just take the old report and resend it.

The second issue Dave noted was that his experiences as a department chairperson who has worked closely with other departments to create new programs has given him a growing appreciation for the power of interdepartmental cooperation, and the value of an interdisciplinary curriculum. Dave's third and final observation was that the department chairperson's role has changed because the student population has changed. He explained,

There are more mental health issues that students are encountering. The students don't appear to be as well prepared for college as students in the past. I might have personally seen this as a faculty member. But, as a department chair, I see more students with problems, so I might see that a little bit more than others in my department.

Dave's work experience offers him a unique organizational perspective from other longterm department chairpersons in this study. In the beginning of his academic career, he was a faculty member who worked with a department chairperson. Then, as a department chairperson, he coordinated the work of his department and reported directly to a dean. Now, as an interim dean, he has over ten department chairpersons reporting directly to him, while he reports directly to his institution's chief academic officer. This experience has afforded Dave a firsthand, 360degree experience of the department chairperson position at his institution. Dave shared, I can say, as an interim dean, that I have a lot of respect for the hard work of my department chairs. In reviewing their annual department reports, I know they're a great group. I have a newfound appreciation for how hard working they are.

Dave explained that he applied for the interim dean position to broaden his experience.
When asked if he considers the interim dean appointment a transition to a permanent administrative appointment, he shared, "Potentially. I didn't apply for the fulltime dean position
here, but I did want to get a taste for administration. It might be here; it might be elsewhere. So I'm open to that possibility."

## John's Story

John is a 49-year-old Black male with industry experience who has been a faculty member for over 20 years. He has worked at a small private, four-year college for more than a decade. He is a full professor, and an expert in a STEM discipline. He earned tenure in 2012. As a department head, John reports directly to the chief academic officer at his institution. However, he also manages a program as an interim associate dean, and in this capacity, he reports directly to his institution's president.

John was recruited to be department head by campus administration. At first, he resisted the offer, viewing the positon as an impingement on his faculty autonomy and ability to spend quality time with his family. John explained,

I was approached on separate occasions about the opportunity, but downplayed the conversations. At the time, we were transitioning. In these transitions, many of us will leave the department and ascend to higher levels of administration within the institution. The first time I said, "No, that's not my style; that means it changes my life." The second time I said, "Let me think about it." The third time, I accepted that they saw something in me. I could do the job. I just needed to wrap my mind around what that meant and how that would change my life. Because as a faculty member, we're free agents. We're independent contractors, to some degree. But as an administrator, there's a difference in the rules by which we operate in terms of time, in terms of commitment, and in terms of exposure. That was something that I had to weigh and balance. I was always struggling with that. To me, it meant that I had to be in the office from a fixed starting time to a
fixed end time. That well-defined, constrained day does not look good for me, because it doesn't play to my strengths. I needed a different schedule. They said, "Sure, you can always do that." So by expanding my day, and diversifying my work locations, I'm able to do the job really well.

John became department head in 2001, serving in the position for the last eight years. He manages a department consisting of six faculty members. Five of these colleagues are tenured, including John, and one colleague is pretenured but on the tenure track. John described his colleagues as hardworking and trustworthy. "This all sounds cliché, but it's true," said John, "we're a close knit group."

In considering his race and gender, John sees both as being a part of his role as a department head at his institution. He described himself as being "hyper sensitive to the potential of discomfort in the learning environment" as a Black man. This leads him to be mindful of other's comfort level with him in the day-to-day environment. By way of example, rather than automatically closing his office door during confidential discussions, he will ask visitors if he they feel comfortable with this action before attempting to do so. John is sometimes mistaken for a student, which initially feels like a complement on his youthful appearance but, as he explained, "Does that mean my physical appearance looks young, or does my appearance not fit the role of a department head for them?" In spite of taking this in his stride, John has more often than not found himself in situations where he was the only person of color in the room in his professional life. "I don't think it's ever bothered me," he said, "but I have always been, unfortunately, the one." John has experienced racial stereotyping at work. As he explained, When I was at my previous institution, they asked me, "So what do you think the African American population of that community thinks about this issue?" I have no idea! I don't
know them. I've never been there. I have learned to become very savvy in the way I speak, and forecasting that my view is my view. For instance, even though there's a small number of people of similar race on our campus, I don't know them all. When I look into the wider world, I am not an anomaly. But on this campus, I am. I take a more mature view, where I can, and I try to bring that back so that people stop and consider that I am just a member of the academy. I just happen to be this orientation, this gender, this race, and this creed.

When John was asked if the department head's role has changed over time, he responded that the role of managing has become "expanding and more volatile." He explained that due to increasing expectations of students and parents, and increasing accountability imposed by outside agencies, the environment of higher education has become more demanding. As John explained,

You're on the front line a little more. We [department heads] try to shield our faculty members. We say, "No, you don't try to talk to the parent. Send the parent to me. Let me be the heavy. Let me be the one who takes the irate phone call or deals with the insinuation of legal action; that's my role. You go teach your class. You go make the students happy." There's a lot more of that.

John is motivated, in part, by his institution's faith in him, and by his strong desire to make a positive contribution to others' experiences. As he explained, When I open my office door, somebody out there is smiling. Through the flexibility that the institution provides me, I'm able to do great things for the students of the department and institution, and for the faculty in the department and institution.

## Luke's Story

Luke is a 45 -year-old White male who has been a faculty member for 14 years, 13 of which he has spent with his current employer. He earned full rank as an expert in a STEM discipline, and works at a large public, R1 institution. Luke earned tenure in 2011, "Which was scary," he noted, "because I became a department administrator very shortly after becoming tenured." As chairperson, Luke served a department consisting of seven fulltime faculty members, including himself. However, within seven years of inhabiting this position, Luke's institution underwent a radical reorganization that resulted in the abolishment of the department chairperson position. In the new scheme, academic departments were replaced with divisions. Luke's academic department was merged with another to create one of the STEM divisions at his institution. Luke's dean then offered him the position of director of his division, to which he accepted. In this new position, he has been reporting directly to his division's dean.

As division director, Luke is now a fulltime administrator for 15 fulltime faculty, including himself, 12 of which are tenured, and three are tenure track. He is also responsible for 50 contingent positions such as instructors, visiting faculty, and research assistants. At the time of his interview, Luke had been a director for one year, making his total time as an academic manager to be eight years. Upon cursory examination, it may appear that Luke's new position is akin to that of associate dean. This may, or may not be the case. Luke's experience as a chairperson is unique from the other study participants in that both he, and his institution, are still grappling with the status and locus of authority assigned to his current position. As Luke described it, "What used to be departments are kind of divisions of some sort," and, "There's a discussion on campus about whether division directors are super chairs or mini deans."

At the beginning of his career, Luke agreed to become department chairperson at the urging of his department colleagues and the encouragement of his dean. According to Luke, Initially, I didn't really want to be chair. It was weird. Some of the senior faculty asked me to put myself forward as chair. I took one for the team by agreeing to put myself forward. But I was very concerned, because I didn't want to be a career associate professor. I worried about getting to full rank with the administrative burden. Luckily, I got out a bunch of papers, and got some graduate students through, that sort of thing. That was enough to get me over the bar for full. I was also afraid of losing my research productivity; I'm still conflicted with that today.

Luke views his former department in positive terms when explaining, "Everybody's respectful. Everybody still gets along really well. That made my life a lot easier. In fact, I don't think I could have been chair for as long under different circumstances. I felt supported by the faculty." His transition to director has been challenging, but positive on many levels. Luke explained,

It's a bit of a grey area. One of the things that happens is that different chairs divide duties differently among their staff. I've seen this first hand. I got used to being a chair in a department where there was a very clear division of labor with [clerical] staff. Now that I'm also managing the added former department, it's different on who does what. That's one of the things I'm struggling with now.

In spite of these growing pains, Luke expressed gratitude for two faculty members from the added former department who had been department chairpersons. Their experiences, as former chairpersons and as people with tacit knowledge of a department of which Luke was not a
member, has helped him to make sense of working with a new group of faculty colleagues and staff.

In spite of his new status as a division director, Luke's faculty identity is strong. Even though it is not required of his directorship, he maintains a similar teaching load to that of his chairperson days by teaching one to two courses per year. This, he explained, he chooses to do to stay connected to his teaching mission, and to relieve some of the burden of his faculty colleagues. Although Luke was careful to explain his change in status from chairperson to director during his interview, he often identified with the chairperson role in his responses to interview questions. By way of example, when describing his organizational identity he noted that, "The struggle for a lot of chairs is that we identify as members of the faculty. But technically, we're administrators. This is depending on what institution you're at. Here, we are considered administrators."

When asked to explain how he thinks his race and gender might have affected his work as a chairperson, Luke responded that although the student population at his institution is racially diverse, the faculty and administration are mostly White. "Being a White man," he said, "has provided me with lots of advantages that I'm probably not even aware of. I do feel more pressure to work more closely at minority and female candidates when we're hiring. I think it should be that way." Luke further explained that his institution employs an even number of female and male faculty, and that this profile holds true for the student population as well. He noted, however, "We obviously have a long way to go before we have gender equality on college campuses. I think the research shows that females are underpaid relative to their male counterparts. That's true at every level."

Luke reported that although he enjoys some aspects of his new position, he considers it a challenging job. He had no immediate plans of stepping down as director, and was transparent about the economic aspects of working as an academic administrator. Luke explained:

One thing that happens to administrators that causes a lot of stress, which nobody ever talks about, is that when we become chairs we usually get a nice salary increment. I think people forget that that increase is temporary. So, you're living a lifestyle that requires you to have that higher salary. That's especially true if you're a chair for a really long time. I've been chair for seven years. So, when this reorganization came up I did wonder what would happen if I wasn't going to be the chair any longer. I realized that I would have to take a huge pay cut to go back to being fulltime on the faculty. Part of that becomes the question of whether I'm doing this job because I love it, or am I doing this job because I need to do it for financial reasons? I sure don't want to be in the job just for financial reasons.

## Mark's Story

Mark is a 65 -year-old White male who is a full professor working as an expert in a humanities discipline at a large, private R1 institution. As a department head, Mark reports directly to a dean. His department is made up of 18 tenured faculty members, including Mark, and two pretenured faculty members on the tenure track. His department is also home to roughly 70 contingent positions that include lecturers and research scientists. Mark's experience is unique among the study participants in that he has served six years as a department head at his current private institution, and seven years as a department chairperson at his former public institution. In addition, earlier in his career he had been associate dean of a graduate program for a brief period. Although he has worked at several universities in his 34-year academic career,
during his interview Mark focused on his current job as department head, and the chairperson job he held immediately prior to it.

In his previous job, Mark worked for 17 years on the faculty at a large, public R1
institution. During the last seven years at this institution, he worked as a department chairperson. As Mark explained,

When I was recruited to my previous institution in 1995 as a tenured associate professor, I was asked in my interview if I would be willing to take my turn as department chair. Of course, I said, "Yes." Ten years later, I was elected chair. It was simply my turn. I was reelected twice because I was good at my job.

At this point in his history, Mark switched institutions in 2012 to work for his current employer, a large private R1 institution. Although not hired in as department head, he described his rapid move into that position,

The idea of being department head might have come up in casual conversation with somebody on the search committee. Given my experience, they thought I might be asked at some point to be head. But it was clearly not what I was explicitly being recruited for. But, with the benefit of hindsight, I think that the dean who hired me had that very much in mind. What happened was, once I had agreed to come, the dean had said, "In a year or two when the current head steps down, I'm going to want you to be department head." I said, "Okay," and I thought that would give me some time to learn the ropes beforehand. However, within weeks of being hired, a series of circumstances led to a vacancy in the department head position in Mark's department. It was then, as Mark explained, "The dean appointed me as interim head. That allowed time for the dean to get to know me in that role. The
dean also got the opportunity to ask the faculty for their feedback on how things were going." After assessing his management to be sound, his dean appointed him department head.

When asked about his perspective as a former department chairperson who is now a department head, Mark reported that he sees his professional identity as an amalgam of teaching and scholarship merged with management. With the exception of his alternate routes to each position, namely, election versus appointment, Mark made no distinctions between the positions in and of themselves. Rather, when comparing his experience of the chairperson and department head roles, he cited differences in the bureaucratic structure and organizational culture of the two relevant institutions as the main source of variance. In his own words, "Every place is a little bit different." However, when asked about his brief experience as an associate dean, Mark characterized this position as markedly different saying that, "when you're at a dean-level job, depending on the size of the institution, even an associate dean level job, you're an officer of the university."

In speaking of his own experience, Mark challenged the stronger positional power normally attributed to the department head position when he explained They describe department heads as part of the leadership, but I think that I'd need a lot more authority to be a leader. Leaders have to be able to bring about certain changes that they want. If I wanted to reorient the department and take it in a particular direction, that would probably mean that I'd need to be able to hire and fire people. And when it comes to tenured faculty members, that's just not going to happen.

Mark also conflated the chairperson and department head titles when making general statements about his role conflict, such as when he explained, "Some think [that] if there is a
problem, the chair or head should be able to fix it, no matter what it is. That is just unrealistic much of the time."

In considering how his gender and race relates to his management, Mark responded, "The job was created at a time when White men dominated academia." Therefore, he explained, "without anyone making a conscious decision about it, the job was designed in a way that was most fitting for White males, such as assuming minimal parental responsibilities, among other things."

After six years managing in his current department, Mark is planning to move on from the department head position. He explained:

I am ready to step down at the end of this year. I have never considered quitting, but my current dean feels the position should rotate after two terms, and my turn is now over. I kept in the role for so long because I am good at the job, and I find it rewarding. Also, the slightly higher salary is an added benefit.

## Paul's Story

Paul is a 60 -year-old White male who has been a faculty member for 32 years and is a full professor. He is an expert in a social science discipline and works at a large, public R2 institution where he earned tenure in 1995. As department chairperson, Paul reports to a dean. He has served as department chairperson for the last six years. Paul's department is made up of 11 tenured faculty, including Paul, three pretenured faculty on the tenure track, and six lecturers. Paul put himself up for election to department chairperson because he and others in his department because, as he explained, "I thought I could do it reasonably well." One of his motivations for seeking the position was the opportunity to assist faculty in being creative with their teaching and research, which was something he saw as lacking in previous department-level
leadership. Paul believes that his responsibility as department chairperson is to maintain order, while being open to new ideas and methods. As he expressed it,

I think order is naturally emergent with people of similar goals. Overall, even if we have disagreement, most people want to have a fairly decent department, a good department where people are doing interesting things and educating well. And there are different ways to get there.

Paul explained that his method of "balancing between chaos and order," as he described it, involves embracing the dual role of the chairperson as both a faculty member and an administrator. Paul explained,

Normally, in our profession, most people feel like it's bottom up leadership and so there's importance in aggregating different opinions. But sometimes you're representing upper administration. Sometimes, the department chair is very inclusive, like, "What do you guys want to do? I'll help carry it out." At other times, you've got to say, "Hey, I think this is the way we've got to go" and offer them the way to do it. So it's between trying to carry on tradition, and at other times saying, "Here's the changes that need to be made." It depends on where your department is in terms of what the department needs to do. Paul enjoys his work as chairperson. However, as he said, "I don't enjoy bureaucratic paperwork." His view of the chairperson experience takes into account both situational and personal characteristics. As Paul put it,

It depends on what kind of chair you want to be. There's actually two parts to the appropriate level of chair. One is determining the current environment of the department. The other is determining the personality of the person who is taking on the role.

When Paul was asked if his thinking of the department chairperson's role has changed over time, he responded, "Yeah, I think you get more experienced at it. Still, things are always changing. I still don't have the role down. There's always new systems. Most of the new systems actually make things worse."

Paul's six years in the chairperson role translates into two, three-year terms. He reported that his department has recently reelected him to serve as chairperson for another three-year term. Paul offered his view on why he has been elected for several consecutive terms as chairperson, while others in his department have not. In doing so, he highlighted the power of the collegium to drive the direction of their own department. Paul explained

I think each department's different. Because, really, it's an opportunity cost. What's the next best alternative to your current chair? This time, I didn't have anyone go up against me. In previous times, the previous chair ran against me. Apparently, because they felt I was doing it [chairperson job] wrong. I can see that from their perspective, I am doing it wrong. But I've had some professors mention to me that if that person had been chair, they wouldn't have tried the different and new opportunities with students that they felt comfortable doing with me. The professors appreciate that I have their back. On the other side, because of that, I do make some mistakes. This doesn't mean I don't follow the policies. It just means that I'm not always focused on doing things by the book. I tend to focus much more on where we want to go, and how we can get there.

## Rose's Story

Rose is a 54 -year-old White female who has been a faculty member for 25 years, and is a full professor. She is an expert in a social science discipline, and works at a small, private M3 institution where she earned tenure in 2003. As department chairperson, Rose reports directly to
the chief academic officer at her institution. Her department is made up of four tenured faculty, including Rose, one pretenured faculty on the tenure track, and 25 lecturers. Rose became the department chairperson in 2000, which was three years before she earned tenure, and eleven years before earning her Ph.D. "Everything at a small college is different," she said, "Back then I could be tenured with the master's. But now we're in line with other schools, so you have to have the terminal degree."

When Rose began teaching in her department, she had no thought of becoming the chairperson. However, after working as a fulltime faculty member for five years, she was approached by her department chairperson, who recruited her as a successor. As Rose explained, her department chairperson "had done it for a long time. Everybody else in the department had been chair, and was not going to take it again." At first, Rose was hesitant, but her chairperson assured her that she had leadership potential and promised to assist her in the transition. Rose described the culture of her institution,

In my institution, people are department chairs because they are serving their departments. Many people have been here a long time, and they're invested in, not just their department, but also the whole institution. So, if they feel that they can do something to help serve the institution and their department, and to make things better for the students, they serve. That's our go-to model here. Everybody here cares deeply for the students.

At first, Rose remained in the chairperson position for two years before stepping down. She explained,

I had just finished my masters, but at the same time, we were launching a new grad [graduate] program, which I was becoming the director of. So now, I had a grad program
to take care of, and I'm chair of the department. I felt like this grad program was not going to get off the ground if I couldn't put more energy into it. So, I did it [chaired the department] for two years. Then I said, "Hmm, no. Somebody else needs to take the chair position so that I can put more energy into growing this grad program." I'm still the director of the program. It's 20 years in, and is running smoothly.

Rose thought of studying for a Ph.D. in 2005. Beginning in 2006, she spent the next five years in a doctoral program while working at her institution. During this time, she worked as a fulltime faculty member and director of the graduate program. However, Rose found herself once again in the chairperson position in 2011, the same year she had earned her Ph.D. According to Rose,

We had a person who was stepping out of the [chairperson] role and leaving the institution. We needed an interim chair to step in to get us through that year. There are times where you look at a situation and you think, "I really could help." I didn't really want to do it, but I thought it probably should be me. I know this institution. I've been here a long time. I knew what needed to happen and nobody else was ready to do it yet. The department was like, "Yes, we want you to continue [as chairperson]" and the administration said, "We want you to continue." The position is an appointment from academic affairs, but they always want to have the faculty supportive of that decision. Since the second appointment as department chairperson, Rose has served eight consecutive years in the position. This, combined with the two years she had served previously, translates into 10 years' experience of the position. Rose explained what motivates her as chairperson, and why she has remained in the position beyond the three-year term set by her institution,

I feel like I've done a decent job. I also believe that my faculty think that I've done a decent job, and that feels good. I've helped to create an environment that's open and transparent, and that we can really talk about things.

When asked if her race or gender has affected her work as department chairperson, Rose responded,

The thing that what comes to mind for me is the gender. I feel like the mama of the department. I don't mean to say that I relate to my faculty as children. But it's a nurturing relationship. That's the way I feel that gender has had anything to do with how I am as a chair.

In the coming year, Rose will leave the chairperson position to become a fulltime administrator of a new program at her institution. She expressed enthusiasm at the prospect of moving into a new stage of her career, as she plans to lend support to the incoming department chairperson.

## Scott's Story

Scott is a 57 -year-old White male who has been a faculty member for 30 years, and is a full professor. He is an expert in a STEM discipline, and works at a small private, 4-year institution that he described as a place where, "everyone has the students' best interest at heart." Scott has been tenured for 25 years. As department head, he manages a department of seven tenured colleagues, including himself, and four pretenured colleagues on the tenure track. He reports directly to the chief academic officer at his institution. He has occupied the department head position for 12 years.

Scott was drawn to the position by his strong desire to move his department forward. After working 18 years as a fulltime faculty member at his institution, there was an opportunity
for new department management. He decided to apply as the only internal candidate in a national search for department head, and was chosen against the external candidates for the position. Scott explained that, in applying for the position, "It was a tough decision, I admit. We had poor leadership in the department. I felt that I could remedy some of that. I saw the problems, and felt I needed to put my talents towards fixing them." Scott highlighted his shift in institutional awareness when he took on the role of department head. As he explained,

I'm thinking about my life as a faculty member before I became a department head. As a faculty member, I think I lived a very sheltered life. Because the only thing I really had to worry about were my classes and my research. I lived in that world. I knew that there were other things within the department that needed to be done, but I didn't see them. As department head, I became part of the entire faculty affairs administrative structure. Becoming department head was the first time in my life where I was put into meetings with the department heads from all the other departments, along with the chief academic officer. We had to solve institutional problems that I had no idea even went on. It was very eye opening. A whole new world was opened up to me. There is so much more complexity. I'm not saying that anybody purposely kept any of that information secret. But, on the other hand, nobody ever really brought it up, and I never really asked. Scott has been happy in the position of department head and has a positive outlook on his institution. Though not blind to his own and others' foibles, Scott sees the students, staff, faculty, alumni, and administration as co-creators in building and maintaining a collegial teaching and research environment. Scott described the culture of his institution,

I'll give you an example of something that happens here that would absolutely blow the mind of most anybody in the academic world. We have a large amount of money each
year that can go towards equipping laboratories. What each department does is sit down and figure out what their priorities are. Then all the department heads come together and divide that money up. We all do this in less than an hour. People don't get all that they want. Not only that, we listen to other people. As an example, just this year none of us got nearly as much as we normally would because one department really, really needed a piece of lab equipment that costs over half a million dollars. They ate up a lot of the money. And the rest of us were more than happy to sacrifice our needs, because we all realized how important that purchase was. This is the reason why we get along so well, and that things work out so well. Yes, we are in departments, but it's like there's no walls. We move through, department by department. Yeah, obviously, I have a budget and other departments have budgets. But we're highly cooperative with one another. I think that the culture can transcend people's individual prerogatives. So if I couldn't have made it to that meeting, and one of my faculty sat in for me, I don't think anything different would have happened.

When Scott was asked if his thinking of the department head's role has changed over time, he responded that this change was one of personal transformation. As he explained, Nothing has really changed, it's matured. It's a better understanding of what you can and can't do, and how to get things done. A lot of that is trial by fire. You learn what works and doesn't work. I've done it long enough. I know what I'm doing. I have a lot of confidence. Experience gives you the confidence to solve problems. But it's not because I'm so talented. It's just experience. Twelve years of doing it amounts to something.

Although Scott said that he has had thoughts of stepping down as department head during difficult times, he reported that his biggest motivation for remaining in the position is his enjoyment of the job. Scott explained,

The thing I hate the most is when you've got to get into disciplinary [personnel] areas. There's nothing fun about it. People are unhappy. You're unhappy. It's stressful. On the other hand, when you're innovating with the students, you have a good time. Faculty energize you. You're doing creative stuff. You're helping lead people. That's an awesome feeling.

## Ted's Story

Ted is a 41-year-old White male who has been a faculty member for 10 years, and is an associate professor. He is an expert in a STEM discipline and works at a small private, 4-year institution. In his capacity as department head, he reports directly to the chief academic officer at his institution, and manages a department of six tenured faculty members, including himself, five pretenured faculty members on the tenure track, and one visiting faculty member. Ted has been a department head for seven years, having been initially appointed interim head in 2013. This was two years before he was tenured. Ted explained,

When I was hired into the department, I did really well my first few years. My teaching was going well. I was getting some research off the ground. I had a good rapport with the students. There were a few senior faculty in the department who had said, "Oh he'd be a good person to take over the department head role at some point in the future."

However, while Ted was still working towards tenure, his department head left the institution for a new opportunity. This resulted in the need for an interim department head. As Ted explained, "A couple of senior faculty had done it before, either on a permanent or interim
basis, but weren't interested in doing it again." Ted did not know that these colleagues had discussed his suitability for the interim position with campus administration until, as he explained,

One of the senior faculty sat down with me and told me that I had everybody's support if I were to think about doing this. They told me that I'd be great for it. I responded that I hadn't ruled it out, but also hadn't thought about it as an assistant professor. They said, "What if $100 \%$ of us were supportive of you? None of us is interested in taking this position, and we think you'd be great at it." They talked me into it that way. I also had a conversation with campus administration, and how this would work for my expectations for tenure, and we worked it out. I decided to do it.

Because Ted enjoyed the interim department head job, he applied for the permanent position in a national search a year later. He explained that, "I felt like I had a better mandate, because I was ultimately chosen to do the job. There had actually been a search, and I was chosen."

After being appointed department head in 2014, Ted later earned tenure in 2015. In discussing his decision to risk being a frontline manager while pretenured, Ted described his view of working among colleagues in academe. He asserted,

I trusted them. I mean, if I didn't get tenure after everything I had been told, then I didn't want to work here anyway. It boggles my mind with some of the political crap that people go through in the tenure process. Some fight to work at a place where it's clearly unhealthy.

In addition to maturing in his role as a teacher and researcher, Ted explained that his focus has changed over time as he has grown into the department head position. As he explained,

When I came in [as department head], I was very, very interested in what I needed to do to make sure the department kept running, like how to manage the budget, how to schedule the classes, the very functional aspects of the job. Over time, as I've gotten more comfortable in the role and gained confidence, it takes me almost zero time to think about the budget. Now I think more strategically. I think about who we should be preparing our students to be. I focus on trends in our discipline and related industries. I asked myself, "What does the person working in our field look like fifteen years from now?" Those were things I was not thinking about in my first few years. Instead, I was thinking about just keeping the department running.

When asked if he thought his race or gender affected other people's expectations of his work as a department head, Ted responded,

As a White man, I'm kind of what people expect to see when they walk through my office door. All their implicit biases of a standard professor in my field are confirmed. I'm cognizant of the fact that I don't feel different, and I know that I don't know what it would be like if I were a different race or gender. I am not of this opinion, but there are some people that can take an attitude that there's an anti-male bias. Like somehow, I am discriminated against because I'm a White man, and others would rather have a woman or a person of color in this role. I don't feel that. I feel that people are happy with who I am.

Ted plans to step down from the department head position in about a year. "Since we're heads," he explained, "we serve at the pleasure of the dean. They [the institution] established a rotational program, so it's every four years. You're really supposed to reapply to the position to give others an opportunity to serve." Another reason why Ted plans to not reapply for the
position is to devote more of his time to teaching and research. As he explained, "This is probably a very unusual answer for any department head at my institution, but I still very much think of myself as a professor." An added reason for Ted's decision to step down is his family. "I want more freedom with my schedule," he said, "particularly in the summer, because department heads here work through the whole summer. I want to have a couple of good years in with my son before he goes off to college."

## Summary

In this chapter, I presented the first part of the study findings by narrating each participants' individual story of how they described themselves, their role as frontline manager, and their pathway to the manager position. I also included select details of participants' personal, professional, and institutional characteristics to help situate their stories within a larger historical, cultural, and institutional context. In the following chapter, I present the second part of the study findings, which are descriptions of the shared experiences of the participants' in their frontline manager role.

## CHAPTER 5

## FINDINGS II

In this chapter, I present part two of the study findings. I expand upon the participants’ stories introduced in Chapter 4 by relating distilled descriptions of their workplace experiences. Specifically, building on the participants' interviews and my notes, I present the categories, or themes, which "highlight significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell \& Poth, 2017, p. 160) of role conflict. Five themes emerged from this examination. These themes are (1) the call of duty, (2) power and authority, (3) complexity and distraction, (4) reframing the roadblocks and, (5) support systems. Subordinate to themes one through four are eight subthemes. These subthemes are (1a) feeling personally responsible, (1b) embracing a personal mission, (2a) establishing locus of authority, (2b) sharing the macro view, (3a) anticipating the workflows, (3b) limiting one's availability, (4a) embracing humor, and (4b) practicing empathy.

## Theme 1: The Call of Duty or, "I Took One for the Team"

The first theme centers on participants' experiences in what led them to their frontline management position. In their stories, the participants revealed that their decision to be a manager was not a power play, but rather, a response to the call of duty. This response was not without some cost or burden. As expressed by one participant, who accepted the department chairperson role in spite of his mixed feelings about losing his research productivity, "I took one
for the team." For all the participants, the pathway to the frontline manager position was accompanied by a sense of personal responsibility buttressed by a clear, personal mission that defined and guided their behavior.

## Subtheme 1a: Feeling Personally Responsible

All participants were able to recall and relate the experiential moment that led them to accept the idea of becoming a frontline manager. In all instances, this moment was accompanied by feelings of dedication to students, colleagues, stakeholders, and the institution as a whole. For the nine participants recruited by peers or administrators into the frontline manager position, the catalytic event precipitating their recruitment was the exit or planned exit of the previous department manager. Whether or not some of these participants had previously entertained thoughts of academic leadership, none were actively seeking a chairperson or department head position at the time of their recruitment. However, what these participants shared were feelings of personal responsibility that led to their decision to take on the manager role. As one participant said, "I agreed to become chair because there were no other good options. At the time, no one else was available to do it." A department head explained, "Other people didn't want to do it. So I had to keep it going."

The department chairperson and department head who were not recruited for the position and who, instead, put themselves up for the frontline manager position did so in response to their belief that they could improve conditions within their respective academic department. In this manner, they also experienced a sense of personal responsibility to their students, colleagues, and institution. As one of these participants explained, "I thought I could do the job reasonably well. I have different priorities than the previous chair. But I thought I could help faculty do more neat things." While the other participant, in explaining his desire to be of service to his institution,
remarked, "The buck stops here; it's about responsibility. Someone has to make sure trains run on time."

While this sense of personal responsibility helps to explain why the participants were open to the manager role, it also explains why they chose to remain in the role long-term. As one chairperson said,

At this point, I don't know if I'd be able to disconnect myself from the health of the department. In fact, I think that's one of the reasons why I took the job. If someone's got to be in charge, it might as well be me.

Another participant explained, "I continue as chair because I feel like I make a difference. It's also a commitment that I've made to my faculty and to my students."

In accessing their careers, participants shared that they sacrificed their scholarly pursuits to accept the position and to remain in the position long-term. All participants expressed a sense of loss at what their research could have been had they not taken on the demanding role of frontline manager. One department chairperson advised, "Don't manage a department unless you're near the end of your career." While a department head said, "The biggest problem is that good people get recruited because other people figure out that they'd be good at it. And while on one hand that's fine, on the other hand you might be derailing someone's career." As one participant put it,

I read somewhere that someone was saying that you could put the weakest faculty member in your department in the chair position, and that was like, ouch! No one has ever said that to me personally. But the thinking is that you pick the guy who is less research active. I certainly don't want to be viewed as the weakest faculty member in my department in terms of research.

## Subtheme 1b: Embracing a Personal Mission

In explaining why they became and remain frontline managers, all participants conveyed a sense of having a clearly defined personal mission. This, they explained, is tempered with care for students, colleagues, and their institution. As one participant said, "The most important personal trait is that you have to absolutely care about everybody in the department, and the institution. If you don't, you have no business being a department head. You can't fake caring." For the participants, enacting a personal teaching and research mission involves ethical considerations. As one chairperson explained,

When I look at problematic leadership, it was lack of caring. It was people who only cared about themselves. But you've got to truly be about caring for the success of everybody in the department, and for the program, and for the students.

Participants believe that what they do matters, and they see their individual place within their organization as that of supporting a larger institutional mission. As one participant explained, "I think in the end, I truly believe that my job as chair is to see to it that students graduate with a good education." Another chairperson shared, "I feel that I'm doing good for the department and the institution. That's what it boils down to. That's why I stay." In describing a department-wide initiative, one chairperson explained,

I continue as chair because I can take the department in new directions in terms of some things that other faculty wouldn't have done. Like, we were able to get some undergraduates involved in research and grants so that we can take them to different states where they have presented their research. That wouldn't have happened before. Participants reported feelings of fulfillment at how their personal mission and their institution's mission align. As one participant explained,

In my institution, people are department chairs because they are serving their departments. So if they feel like that they can do something to help serve the institution and their department, and to make things better for the students, they serve. Everybody here cares deeply for the students.

## Theme 2: Power and Authority or, "Policy is a Warm Blanket"

The second theme describes participants' experiences of power and authority in dealing with the demands of their organizational roles within their respective departments. Participants alluded to their liminal position within their organization, and its effects on how others perceived them and how they choose to exert their influence on others. Coming from a place of service, participants enthusiastically shared stories of collegiality and cooperation in which they were able to bring about positive change such as procuring much needed resources for their colleagues, working with others to design new programs, or assisting students. In sharing these happy memories, participants often described how they gently circumnavigated the system to effect positive change. However, when talking of conflicts related to power and authority, they turned to organizational power structures and rules to guide their conduct. As one chairperson said,

You deal with a lot of things unofficially, informally, keeping it as simple as possible.
But you learn early on that when you need to, you take it up a notch, and then you need to invoke official procedures. I have learned to love procedure. I have learned that policy is a warm blanket. It's not that you shouldn't use discretion from time to time. But sometimes you get to a certain point and then you need to say, "Okay, what is our procedure on this?"

Participants emphatically rejected autocracy as a part of the leadership toolbox, and instead framed their positional power as one of responsibility and stewardship. "One of the things you often hear," said one chairperson, "is that people who desperately want to be in positions of authority often shouldn't be. That's true." In a similar vein, one department head shared,

When I hear the word, power, I think of responsibility. I'm not big on power any more than I have to, because it just means more responsibility. I have enough responsibility; I don't need any more. I'm not about power at all. I try to say, "Yes," to everybody's request. When it comes to course scheduling, I try to make the loads as equal as I possibly can. I can't guarantee that it's going to be perfectly even because specialties play a role, as well as specific demands at a given time. But, I hope everybody always sees that I'm being evenhanded.

How the participants described their experience of power and authority is situational in nature and pertained to working with others in establishing or reinforcing common goals. At times, these situations involved the participant negotiating, distributing, or enforcing their authority. At other times, this involved the participants sharing information in an effort to assist others in accepting institutional constraints.

## Subtheme 2a: Establishing Locus of Authority

In establishing who has power and authority over whom within their academic department, participants employ strategies that enable them to enact their administrative duties, such as resource allocation and human resource development, while maintaining trust with their colleagues. One strategy is to distribute the leadership among their colleagues on certain issues,
which appeals to the participants' sense of fairness, garners trust, and engenders cooperation. As one chairperson shared,

One of the things that I was dreading the most when I became department chair was having to figure out faculty raises. I mean, these are my colleagues and a raise is a symbol of how you are being valued. The process for evaluation at that time in my department was incredibly subjective and up to the department chair's whims. I knew that was going to have to change immediately. I put together a faculty committee. I gave them some parameters. They came up with a draft, which we tweaked a little bit. We took this draft to the department and got everybody on board with it. By the time I had to do my first set of annual evaluations, we had a brand new evaluation system in place that the department faculty all signed on to. So, I'm the one who initiated that, but it was in response to a felt concern of the faculty wanting to be evaluated fairly and in knowing how their raises were being determined. I still look back at that as one of the best things that I did. I never had any complaints.

In other instances, participants encourage affinity with their department colleagues by reminding them of the limits of their own authority. As one department head related, Not too long ago I had a faculty meeting, and I had one frustrated colleague say to me [mimicking a superciliousness tone], "You should tell the dean blah, blah, blah." I kind of made a joke of it and said, "I really can't tell the dean that." Everybody laughed. I think everybody knows that I cannot tell the dean what to do. I can make requests. I can make suggestions. But I can't order the dean about, and people understood that, and the person backed off.

In this way, participants reported dealing with challenges to their authority by reminding colleagues that they themselves are constrained by the rules. According to one chairperson, "I've never had a problem expressing my views in a faculty meeting that I'm sorry an administrator is doing something inconvenient, and that I disagree with the decision, but that this is the way the institution is going." Another chairperson shared,

We have course evaluations where I, as the chair, sit in on classes of tenured and pretenured faculty. It's laid out in the faculty handbook and it's expected of all chairs. There's this tenured, full rank colleague. He has seniority over me. It seemed to him like I would be intruding to observe his class. It was clear what I was supposed to do. But it was dicey on how to go about doing it. It was helpful for me to be able to tell him, "Hey, this is in the handbook. This is not me; this is the handbook. I'm doing this for everybody. It's not just you. I'm not trying to sit in your class because I want to watch you." And he eventually realized that I was just fulfilling a part of the process. For the participants, making independent decisions beyond their normal, daily duties is done selectively. Their ability to embrace authority over their department peers is determined by careful assessment of their political capital tempered by the importance of making a decision. One chairperson explained,

One thing that I did that was a unilateral decision was with regard to service on departmental committees. I said, "If you're pretenured, I expect you to be on at least one department committee. If you're tenured, I expect you to be on at least two." One tenured faculty member really objected to that. They said, "We didn't vote on that." I said, "Well, I don't do too many things unilaterally, but this just seems to me to be so common sense that I didn't feel the need to bring it up to the department." The department accepted my
decision because it's not that heavy a service load, it supports the department, and it guarantees that the pretenured faculty have some service in the department.

## Subtheme 2b: Sharing the Macro View

Participants also reported their experience of conflict related to their department colleagues' lack of knowledge or consideration of institutional systems or imperatives. Participants mitigate such conflict by communicating a larger, macro view of their institution's workflow processes and mission. This serves two main purposes, it helps to convince their colleagues that their decisions are not capricious, and sharing information serves to garner trust. As one chairperson explained,

The impression among the faculty is often that a decision is made high up in the hierarchy and that the faculty were never considered. This makes a decision feel like it's being imposed on people. Lots of communication is key. Communication is everything. I let people know explicitly how the department or program fits in with the strategic plan and the overall goals of the institution. I help people see those connections. People get into their little silos. So, I assist my department faculty with an airplane view of an issue, so they can see the bigger picture.

In some instances, this dynamic emerges from a colleague's lack of understanding of the manager's perspective. Sometimes, these are scheduling issues in which a faculty member feels constrained or slighted by the manager's decision. In such conflict situations, participants experience great dissatisfaction. They reported feeling misunderstood and isolated. As one department head explained,

I find that most of my frustration comes from the fact that if something blows up, or if there's a mini drama, that people don't seem to appreciate that I spend all my time trying
to make other people happy. Pretty much the only person I don't factor in terms of their wants and needs when I'm making course planning decisions is myself. One chairperson, in reliving a situation in which a department colleague complained about their class schedule, said, I needed to let them know that if we were to make a change like they asked it would have this set of repercussions going down the line. Therefore, addressing their issue A , would then have popped up issues B, C, and D, in the program schedule. Now, I need to address that. So, unless they could give me a really strong argument why issue A needs to be the predominant issue, I had to go with the schedule as is.

Sometimes, assisting colleagues in taking a macro view of the organization requires seeking clarity by entertaining the perspectives of upper administration. As one department chairperson explained,

I had a faculty member who complained about their salary in relation to that of some department colleagues. They wanted an equity raise. I said, "If you think you're paid less than someone who you think you're comparable to, the first thing to do is look at their c.v. [curriculum vitae] and compare that to yours." So, what I presented to them was the kind of data that I need to be able to go to the dean's office and try to ask for an adjustment. I explained to them that if we don't have this kind of data, then we don't have a case. I knew full well that the person making the complaint did not have a good case, and they couldn't come up with a comparable c.v. So, in the end, we made no application to the dean. But I also wanted them to know that I was treating them fairly, and that I was being the best advocate for them that I was able.

All participants reported that the two highly stressful situations for an academic frontline manager is terminating a program or dealing with the fallout of such a termination, and terminating someone's employment. Such situations have the potential to demoralize the department. As one chairperson explained,

The most difficult thing I've had to deal with is when we've had program cuts. I had to let some contract people go. And, people tend to get territorial and we have our identity in our work. That's been the hardest thing to negotiate as a chair, is to try to make sure that everybody's still okay, and that the department can still have enough mojo to work effectively. Sometimes the decision is good for the institution, and sometimes it isn't. But you have to try to help your people to understand the thinking of the person or persons making these decisions. That can, of course, be very hard to do when it feels personal.

One department head, who terminated a colleague with his department's approval, said, "I have the dubious distinction, and I wouldn't wish this on any human being, to work towards terminating a tenured faculty member. That's not an entitlement that one wants, I guarantee. That's a miserable experience." In making such difficult decisions, or in assisting their department colleagues in responding to difficult circumstances, participants communicated a bigger picture of the situation to faculty who spend their days tightly focused on their classes, their research, and departmental-level concerns. One department head, who had to communicate his decision to terminate a program that was the focus of a colleague's subspecialty, explained how he approached informing his colleague of that painful decision,

I tried to facilitate a role reversal where they can take on my position, or the lens that I see through. I used my desktop screen to show them the figures. I said to them, "Here's
what I pay. Here's what I receive. You see the lack of participation in your program? You see negative return on investment, meaning none, or that we're actually spending money?

If this were your budget to manage, what would you do?"
After delivering the financial realities of the situation, the department head said that in situations such as these, "Sometimes they appreciate having more detail, sometimes, not. I give them the facts, and I leave the door open for them to return."

## Theme 3: Complexity and Distraction or, "Keep Your Own Calendar"

Theme three describes the participants' experience of the well-documented competing and compounding duties and obligations inherent in the chairperson role. One chairperson succinctly described how the participants live this conflict by saying, "If you want to keep track of all that stuff, keep your own calendar, because you can't always rely on the college to tell you," Participants shared the experience of using two methods of protecting themselves from being overwhelmed by their duties. One method is to adjust their workload continually by anticipating the more demanding times of their day, week, month, semester, and year. Another method is to find ways of being available to others while still maintaining the time and physical space to concentrate on their duties. As one chairperson shared, "After being in the job a while, I have a better idea of what happens and when, and that makes me better in terms of long-term planning."

## Subtheme 3a: Anticipating the Workflows

All participants explained that, because of the equivocal nature of their work, anticipating the ebb and flow of their environment is a helpful, but not a foolproof method of prioritizing their duties. As one chairperson shared,

If deans need information from you, they just request it. But what can be annoying is if the vice chancellor is telling the dean only two days in advance, and then the dean is telling the chair only two days in advance. It would be helpful if the dean could tell you, "I need you to start thinking about this because the vice chancellor is probably going to request this in a month or two."

In an ideal world, being warned of an impending request might be expected. However, in spite of their frustration with unanticipated circumstances, participants shared their awareness of the constant change experienced by everyone in their environment. As one chairperson explained, "There's always a level of uncertainty for everyone. New systems and priorities are introduced and dropped, and different people are going to have a say in changing policies."

Marking out the times in their calendars where they anticipated specific commitments would blossom allows the participants some level of control over their environment. In managing their time, participants employed the same methods used by many academics by adjusting their work to the rhythms and patterns of the semester. One chairperson shared,

What I do depends on the week. In some weeks, one role is going to take precedence over the other. During our two weeks of registration, I tend to be very busy with that because registration is a part of my chair responsibilities. At this time of year, there are fewer faculty meetings.

A department head shared, "There are times of the year where I have more reports to write. I anticipate those deadlines. I look at the entire school schedule and I know that there are going to be times where some things take precedence." Oftentimes, deadlines are distant and require long-term planning. The need to look beyond the semester, and sometimes beyond the year, was best expressed by a chairperson who explained,

What I do really depends on what fire is burning at the moment. If we have an accreditation report that's due, then for the year prior to it my life revolves around that. I have to prioritize that, which means I'm going teach one less class. So there are certain things that take priority at certain seasons.

By doing their best to mark out the patterns of their institution's workflows, events, and obligations, participants reduced some of the uncertainty of their environment by making informed decisions on how to prioritize their duties. This practice also assisted them in long-term planning, such as preparing for accreditation visits, and in working on other complex projects requiring them to rely on the work of others.

## Subtheme 3b: Limiting One's Availability

Deciding on what duty or project takes precedence, however, cannot be judged entirely by the calendar. One participant speculated about his department colleagues who had never served as chairpersons themselves when remarking, "The sheer volume and complexity of the work would blow their minds. It's a never-ending parade of issues and problems and, in some cases, very difficult and emotional challenges." Within this distracting and demanding environment, finding a way to create space to attend to their duties becomes a daily challenge for participants as they use a variety of strategies to limit their availability to others. For one department head, this involved allowing his department colleagues to see his online calendar to build trust and to help explain his intermittent absences from his office. As he explained, "Since we share our calendars within the department, they can clearly see what's going on with me at any point in time."

Maintaining trust and practicing good stewardship by being accessible to others is of paramount concern to the participants. They balance their accessibility to others with the demands of their job by selectively limiting their availability. As one participant shared, It's really important for chairs to be visible. So I've always kept an open-door policy. What I have learned to accept is that being the chair is my number one job. Don't get me wrong, I still take my teaching and research very seriously. But I know that the pecking order is that everyone else has to have their stuff in order and only then can I worry about me. I've always struggled with this. There are days when I close my office door, or take an afternoon and work from home. But I don't like to do that. I like to be visible and accessible.

Limiting accessibility ranges from temporarily putting people off, setting aside certain times for availability, such as office hours, or temporarily vacating the premises. One department head remarked,

I get a lot of interruptions. I seldom have an uninterrupted hour or two. It's impossible for me to put up a sign that says, "Do not disturb." I have no problem telling a student, "Look, I'm meeting with someone, come back in an hour." But I'm not just going to shut them out. If I must get something complicated done quickly, I'll schedule a block of time for myself and I'll go to the library or a local coffee shop. I'll hide somewhere. But that's only when I'm up against a fairly hard deadline.

Another participant shared that, as chairperson, they dislike being unavailable to colleagues but that, "If I have something very, very important to do, I might close my door."

## Theme 4: Reframing the Roadblocks or, "I Adapt and Overcome"

The fourth theme describes behaviors adopted by participants in response to organizational and interpersonal hindrances, and how they reframe such difficulties in a more positive light. In facing roadblocks, participants employ the macro view that they share with their colleagues to transform their difficulties into challenges that are worth meeting. One chairperson shared,

Well, if a [faculty] position doesn't get funded, I adapt and overcome. I continue to push forward in the future. Probably because of my long tenure in the role, I tend to look broadly on such things and know that other departments are experiencing the same issues. Of course, I continue to be an advocate for my department, but I know ahead of time that I'm not going to win every battle.

In addition to dealing with disappointments caused by a lack of resources, the participants actively manage their interpersonal issues. Maintaining positive relationships is a conscious goal shared by all participants. As one department head explained, "You are dealing with people. There is no secret formula to management. As a leader, you have to care about everybody, even if you don't like them. You're not going to like everybody. It's just the way it is." A chairperson described their feelings of a colleagues' extremely fastidious behavior during department meetings thusly,

Yes, this person is very difficult. I always have antacids or ibuprofen, or both, on my desk because it drives me crazy. There are things I get so frustrated with about them. But at the same time, this person does so many things wonderfully well, especially in helping the students. So if that's the only thing they do that I don't like, I'm okay with it.

Maintaining resiliency with a benevolent attitude in response to organizational and interpersonal hindrances involves emotional regulation and compassionate thinking (Vidya et al., 2020). During their interviews, participants demonstrated that one method they used to respond to feelings of frustration, alienation, and sadness was reframing. Reframing is looking beyond one's immediate emotional and intellectual response to stimuli to appreciate an alternate view (Berkovich \& Eyal, 2018; Kalliath \& Kalliath, 2014; Reframing, 2001; Samson \& Gross, 2012). The two reframing behaviors all participants shared in dealing with their role conflict was engaging in humor and practicing empathy. Embracing these behaviors assists the participants in maintaining perseverance, long-term commitment, and geniality in the face of their difficulties.

## Subtheme 4a: Embracing Humor

Humane, good-natured humor has been identified as a behavior that successfully facilitates cognitive reframing of negative experiences (Hart et al., 2014; Kalliath \& Kalliath, 2014; Rice \& Liu, 2016; Samson \& Gross, 2012). In this study, participants related painful stories about their workplace conflict. During their individual interviews, they displayed a sense of humor devoid of sarcasm or pettiness. Rather, their humor highlighted the ridiculous and the absurd while inviting me, the interviewer, to share in the joke. This humor served to spotlight the ambiguity and complexity of their frontline manager role while acknowledging their difficulties in the fulfillment of their duties.

When asked what advice they might give persons considering a chairperson position, one participant chuckled, "Don't do it! Run!" Another participant, when asked to describe their chairperson duties, teasingly said, "That's a good question. Do you want the Twitter version or the longer version?" while a third chairperson half-jokingly said, "I would say [pause], bring people food and coffee, lots and lots of coffee." In acknowledging the demands of their job, one
department head jokingly remarked, "You have to do the job without giving up your soul. Well, I do give it up sometimes. It ebbs and flows. I give it up. I get it back again. I give it up." Participants employed humor to describe the equivocal nature of their job. As one participant shared, "I asked my dean how I was going to be evaluated when I started as department head. They said to me, "Don't screw up," Well, that just made everything incredibly clear." Immediately after saying this, the participant burst into laughter. While sharing the experience of being taken for granted by his colleagues, another participant laughingly said, "A lot of what you do as a chair involves putting out fires and keeping things from blowing up. Nobody ever comes into work and says to you, "Hey, nothing blew up today! Wow! Good job!"

In their interviews, participants used humor to describe the overwhelming demands of the job. A department head, in explaining his availability to his colleagues, feigned panic while saying, "They [colleagues] know that when my door is closed, I'm very busy. And I guess two appropriate responses to that should be, please leave me alone, or for god's sake, please come in and help me out!" In relating the memory of attempting to step down from the chairperson position, another participant framed their experience thusly,

A couple of years ago, I thought about stepping down because I was so overworked and tired, and people noticed. I asked around, but nobody else in the department came forward to be chair. Um [laughing], do ya think I should have acted perkier about the job?

A very funny moment occurred during one interview after a chairperson had related an incident involving a deeply upsetting personnel issue. One of the most distressing aspects of the story was the disagreeable predicament of a department colleague, and the participant's resultant sadness about the situation. When asked to further describe their feelings about this experience,
the participant's response was, "Bad [pause]. It felt bad [pause]. Really bad [pause]. Very, very bad? Oh, I guess you're going to need a little more detail than that, uh?" This comment, coming on the heels of such a distressing story, resulted in both participant and interviewer erupting into peals of cathartic laughter.

Employing humor to cope with difficult situations can be misread as callous or uncaring. However, at no time did participants disrespect the people they referred to in their stories. Participants were clear in communicating that they felt negative emotions, such as frustration and sadness, while experiencing these events. However, in looking back on these incidents, they chose to use humor to reframe their experiences. In doing so, they described their role conflict without allowing it to defeat them.

## Subtheme 4b: Practicing Empathy

Those who practice empathy have the "capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference, that is, the capacity to place oneself in another's position" (Bellet \& Michael, 1991, p.1831). Moreover, the intellectual and emotional requirements of empathy encourage insight into others' behaviors and have the potential to engender acceptance (Kalliath \& Kalliath, 2014; Lloyd et al., 2017; Sims, 2017). As one chairperson remarked, "Acceptance has become one of my coping mechanisms. Everyone has feelings. It's a part of what life is all about." Nowhere is this merging of empathy and acceptance more apparent than in the participants' descriptions of how they reframe constraints placed on them by administrators. One participant, in explaining their approach to mitigating conflict borne of opposing agendas, said,

I think one of the real problems we have with conflict is that people often don't understand other people's intentions. When you start getting to people's intentions, then
you can help resolve problems in ways that have less conflict. There have been instances where the faculty have said that a particular administrative decision is a real stupid [sic] idea, and I've explained the administration's intention in making that decision and why it matters. The communication goes in both directions. The intentions of faculty sometimes has $[s i c]$ to be passed onto the administration too. That gets back to the idea of the chair being the middle person who is responsible for communicating in both directions. In describing how they dealt with the cancellation of a long-standing department program, and the resultant loss of many faculty lines, one participant described how they led themselves to acceptance by practicing empathy for the decision-makers. This chairperson shared,

You eventually get to the point where you realize that the people who make those toplevel decisions are trying to do the best for the institution. It may not be what I think is best. But at some point, I realize that there was a reason for the decision and that all I can do is my best. If I think it was a wrong decision, then I try to make the best of it and move forward. Those types of decisions can feel personal when it's not ever meant to be personal; it's meant to be something that's good for the institution.

Participants described their experiences of surviving periods of conflict as an exercise in empathy. Such empathy helps them to resist partisanism. As one chairperson shared,

We often have creative ideas in the department but don't get the resources to follow through. This does make for an us-against-them perspective with the dean. But I can see it from the dean's standpoint. Yes, we are desperate for another faculty line, but every department is desperate. I mean, the dean has to negotiate with their superiors too; they don't get everything that they want.

Understanding other people's perspectives also offers participants the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. One chairperson explained, "I've worked with so many different administrators over the years. Different administrators have different priorities and respond to different things. You have to understand your audience."

Empathy meshed with self-awareness leads participants to identify with others. When asked to speculate why their faculty colleagues did not notice the enormity of their chairperson duties, one participant said, "It's human nature. People have a tendency to take things for granted. I do the same with the administration. I'll notice when something goes wrong. But if everything runs smoothly, then I don't really notice." In discussing the same topic, a department head shared,

I'm the one who makes the trains run on time. If we were to run out of money before the next fiscal year, the department is going to know because they can't run their labs. But if the money's managed well, that's the kind of thing that faculty quickly take for granted because it's human nature. Anything that always works is something you take for granted. When the trains run on time, you don't expend energy on wondering what it took to make that happen. We all do this. I find myself doing this.

In describing an incident where they had to address the spread of false information that was demoralizing their department, one department head demonstrated how empathy, affinity, and acceptance intertwine when explaining,

Knowing why rumors get started is like, I think you have to walk a mile in other people's shoes to get why they start rumors. To be honest, my job as department head is totally describable on paper. But when other people see me in closed-door meetings, it's easy for them to spin a yarn about what's going on behind that door. We do this all the time in our
daily lives when we talk about politics or when we read about celebrities. I think it's human nature.

A powerful aspect of empathy is that it offers participants a level of circumspection that discourages them from acting on their own negative emotions. In explaining why a colleague's uncharacteristic outburst did not personally offend, one chairperson explained, "I knew why they felt the way they did, and that they'd need time to calm down." Another participant shared their belief that when people act out aggressively in response to administrative decisions, the manager should not respond to this aggression by bickering. Instead, the participant uses empathy as a guide to understanding and a focus of their leadership. This participant said,

People who are hurting and angry can be ignorant of the situation or they've been scorned. Maybe they got passed over for something they wanted, or something adversely happened to one of their projects. Maybe their pride has been seriously bruised. If we, as department heads, can help to soothe their scar tissue by giving them greater information, more time, and more attention where appropriate, then I think we find ourselves doing our job.

## Theme 5: Support Systems or, "Find Yourself a Council"

The fifth and final theme is the participants' experience of institutional and/or interpersonal support in negotiating the demands of their frontline manager roles in relation to their role conflict. This support includes the participant's experiences of learning and keeping up-to-date on their managerial duties, and the sharing of information and support with others in their professional lives. In an environment where peers can become managers and managers can step down to become peers, participants use the liminal conceptual space between the collegium
and bureaucracy to seek out mentoring relationships. These relationships provide support during difficult times. As one department head shared,

There was a time where the leadership above me was not creating an environment in which I felt valued. Fortunately, I have a council, which is what I call them. They're a group of more experienced faculty members who have previously been administrators or have been with the college for a very long time. They are my mentors. But we get together very informally. There are about six of us. I'd advise anyone contemplating being a department head to find yourself a council.

Without the support of their council, this participant reported that he might have stepped down from his manager position. However, the crisis did pass, and the participant made it through the experience. Emotional support and camaraderie are important elements of mentorship (Cree-Green et al., 2020; Gabbe et al., 2008). Sharing critical information is another (Cree-Green et al., 2020; Gabbe et al., 2008; Linskey \& Patterson, 2009; Ross et al., 2014). This participant went on to explain,

I actually have two councils, one here at the college and an external one. My internal council gives me institutional knowledge. But people in my external council help me to understand best practices. When you map those two groups together, you can come back and put together your own plan of action.

Participants depend on the camaraderie and advice of mentoring relationships. "There are a couple of chairs I meet with informally," said one participant, "like for lunch or coffee, just to talk. There is some camaraderie in that. It's helpful to have those connections."

None of the participants reported having formal training before stepping into the frontline manager position and, looking back on the experience, they commented on their naiveté. As one
department chairperson shared, "Before I became chair, I think that I didn't know what I didn't know. It was like, ignorance is bliss, right? But I try to keep learning as much as I can." As evidenced in their stories, while most participants' prime mentor was the person who had recruited them into the position, they still had the need for continual training. One chairperson described this need when sharing,

Before the previous chair left, they got out a legal pad and filled up three pages of things that chairs need to do. So I felt very confident at that point because I had this list of things that I needed to do. It wasn't until a few months later when I realized that this list was just the tip of the iceberg. Now, after all these years, there were things coming up that didn't even exist when that list was created.

Participants described situations in which the lack of formal, ongoing training from their institution forced them to find their own training. Often, this assistance came from other faculty members and frontline managers. One chairperson, in lamenting on this lack of training and their desire to assist the next generation, said,

New chairs need and deserve training. Something really simple would be to just giving a chair a timeline of their responsibilities. As a new chair, the best thing that was provided to me was a print calendar that said, "In February, you're going to be doing this; in October, you need to be doing this." My mentor, the previous chair, gave me that calendar many years ago. When you can look a few months ahead and see what's coming down the pike, you can prepare for it. I definitely am going to give a similar calendar to my successor.

The greatest need for ongoing training and assistance relates to one of the most demanding aspects of participants' frontline manager roles, which is dealing with personnel
issues. Such issues, participants noted, require knowledge of human resources best practices. These are not skills that most faculty have had the opportunity to cultivate before becoming managers. Moreover, the strong communication skills that many faculty acquire as teachers and scholars are not seamlessly transferable to difficult personnel situations because of faculty autonomy and threats to the manager's subculture affiliation. As one participant explained, Dealing with personnel issues is very, very difficult. Those are areas where every department head, including myself, needs lots and lots of guidance. It's not something that most of us have had to deal with in our lives before as faculty. Faculty deal with conflicts with students, but that's a slightly different role. Students go away, department colleagues don't. You're all tenured, so you live with these people for your career. In considering the need for support, one participant summed up their view of mentorship as,

The first thing I would counsel administration to do is to make sure you have a mentor for your new department chairs. Either the dean themselves could do the mentoring, or perhaps you could find another chair to be the mentor. That's what I've done as a longstanding department chair. I've acted as a mentor for department chairs before, and I'm doing parts of that now. I never turned down a request to mentor. Having a mentor is really important.

## Summary

In this chapter, I presented part two of the study findings by describing the themes and subthemes that transcended the study participants' experiences of their frontline manager role conflict. Five themes emerged from this examination. These themes are (1) the call of duty, (2) power and authority, (3) complexity and distraction, (4) reframing the roadblocks and, (5)
support systems. Subordinate to themes one through four are eight subthemes. These subthemes are (1a) feeling personally responsible, (1b) embracing a personal mission, (2a) establishing locus of authority, (2b) sharing the macro view, (3a) anticipating the workflows, (3b) limiting one's availability, (4a) embracing humor, and (4b) practicing empathy. In the following chapter, I employ the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology to review, analyze, and interpret the study findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

## CHAPTER 6

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate, describe, and interpret the organizational role conflict experienced by academics who serve as long-term department chairpersons and department heads. To aid in this investigation, I explored the following three research questions to examine the role conflict experienced by the study participants:

1. How do long-term department chairpersons or long-term department heads describe their organizational/professional identities?
2. How do long-term department chairpersons or long-term department heads experience and navigate their faculty and department manager roles and others' expectations of them?
3. How have long-term department chairpersons or long-term department heads made sense of their faculty and manager roles and others' expectations of them over time while in the department chairperson position?

In this chapter, I present my analysis of the study findings in two parts through (1) narrative review and (2) theme analysis. I begin the first part of this chapter with a narrative review of the participants' stories presented in Chapter 4. As my method of situating these findings within a historical and cultural context, I examine these data in conjunction with the organizational models, organizational roles, and organizational subcultures described in the

Chapter 2 literature review. I also refer to new material in my examination of participants' race and gender. In the second part of this chapter, I present an analysis of the themes presented in Chapter 5. As my method of uncovering the shared experiences of the participants' organizational role conflict, I relate these data to the theoretical framework of role theory and organizational theory as described in the Chapter 2 literature review.

## Part 1. Review of Participants' Stories

## Mintzberg's Model as Subculture Affiliation

Participants working as department chairpersons and department heads described themselves as being the bridge between their academic department and their dean or chief academic officer. Similarly, the two fulltime administrators, interim dean Dave, and division director Luke, described their chairperson work in like fashion. This places the study participants at the middle line of Mintzberg's (1979) linear hierarchy of a professional bureaucracy (Figure 2). Specifically, participants occupy the middle line between the strategic apex, which in higher education becomes the institution's bureaucracy subculture, and the operating core, which embodies the collegium subculture.

Even though both the department chairperson and department head positions occupy the middle line within the organization, there are variations on where participants can be located within Mintzberg's hierarchy of authority. Since department chairpersons and department heads have been identified as belonging to the collegium and bureaucracy subcultures respectively (Krause, 2006; Porter, 1961), it is reasonable to presume that chairperson participants would slide downwards towards the bottom of the middle line near the operating core and collegium subculture. Likewise, it can be expected that department head participants would slide upwards in the middle line towards the strategic apex and bureaucracy subculture. Such definitive
distinctions of subculture affiliation, however, are not borne out by the data. Unsurprisingly, all five department chairpersons, Abe, Beth, Clark, Paul, and Rose, characterized themselves as traditional academics and stressed that what distinguishes them from the rest of the faculty community is that they happen to have added administrative responsibilities. This indicates that while these participants acknowledge their administrative responsibilities, their professional and organizational identity is that of the collegium in which they share authority with their department colleagues.

However, participants who were not department chairpersons at the time of their interview were dissimilar in how they represented themselves. Of the four department heads in this study, both John and Scott explicitly identified themselves with the administrative arm of their respective institutions, which places them within the bureaucracy subculture. While John's decision to accept the department head position involved negotiating a new administrative identity, Scott's department head position indoctrinated him into a bureaucratic world previously unknown to him. Like the chairperson participants, John and Scott, both of whom teach, characterized their role as one of fostering collaboration and cooperation within their respective departments. However, unlike the department chairperson participants, they also claimed authority not shared with their department colleagues. This places John and Scott closer to their institutions' strategic apex when compared to the department chairpersons in this study.

The other two department heads, Mark and Ted, were dissimilar in how they described themselves. Mark, the participant who had worked as a department chairperson, a department head, and briefly as an associate dean said that his experiences of the chairperson and department head positons have been similar in terms of locus of authority, and that he saw himself as belonging equally to the collegium and bureaucracy subcultures. Mark's dual identity suggests
that he is centered within Mintzberg's middle line. Further, Mark shared his belief that institutional culture colors people's perceptions of the collegium and bureaucracy subcultures. His observation is in agreement with researchers who assert that an institution's local culture reflects back upon perceptions of group affiliation and locus of authority (Abu-Alruz \& Khasawneh, 2013; Birnbaum, 1988; Bowen \& Tobin, 2015; Manning, 2018; Morgan, 2006; Weerts et al., 1985). While other study participants may agree with Mark's observation, he was the only participant to volunteer this perspective when asked specifically about his identity. By way of example, when Scott described the highly collegial environment of his institution, he expressed his belief that institutional culture influences group behavior. However, Scott did not share this insight while alluding to his own identity. Mark's work history of inhabiting the department chairperson and the department head roles at two different institutions may have provided him with the opportunity to develop a varied and nuanced role perspective not experienced by his fellow study participants.

The fourth department head, Ted, identified himself as that of a professor first, and an administrator second. Because of this, Ted's identity is in sympathy with the study participants who are department chairpersons in terms of his collegium affiliation and locus of authority. This places him closer to Mintzberg's operating core. Department heads Mark and Ted, however, have one thing in common. Both are looking forward to stepping down from their department head positions to make more time for other pursuits. Although Mark works at a large research university, and Ted at a small college, one reason both shared for this planned transition is that their campus administration preferred the department head position to rotate among the faculty in their respective departments. This internal, rotational model of management is normative to the chairperson experience, and has been cited as a fundamental difference between the chairperson
and department head positions (D. George, personal conversation, March 3, 2020; Is There Any, 2014; Krause, 2006; Porter, 1961;). Mark and Ted's experiences, however, suggest that distinctions between the two managerial positions, though real, may not be as universally absolute as has been asserted.

Dave and Luke, the two participants who occupied fulltime administrative positions at the time of their interview, shared some similarities and differences in how they identified themselves. Both participants showed awareness that their current fulltime administrative positions afforded them greater authority than their previous frontline managerial positions. Thus, their current administrative positions push them out of the middle line and into the strategic apex. At the same time, because they were interviewed about their recent chairperson experiences, they also showed a strong affinity with the middle line during their interviews. However, unlike department head Mark's embracement of a harmonized, scholar/manager identity, Dave and Luke's descriptions of their academic identities were temporal in nature.

Dave, the former department chairperson who had become an interim dean, spoke of himself in dualistic terms. When he talked about his life as a chairperson, he expressed how these experiences had prepared him for a new role as interim dean. In this, what Dave may have been experiencing is a forward-looking indoctrination into the bureaucracy subculture. Conversely, Luke, who compared his past life as a chairperson to his new life as a division director, shared nostalgic regret at the loss of his faculty identity and his concern over a decline in future research productivity. Luke's mixed feelings about his new fulltime administrative role may have been influenced by the novelty of his institution's radical reorganization, as he and many of his fellow division directors question where they fall within their institution's hierarchy.

## Tucker's Organizational Roles as Subculture Affiliation

The labels used by participants to describe how they interpret their organizational roles conforms to Tucker's (1984) 28 potential roles that chairpersons are obligated to assume within the normal course of a workday. When comparing Tucker's roles categorized by (1) collegial and (2) bureaucratic subcultures (Table 2), the department chairpersons, department heads, and fulltime administrators in this study used terms and concepts categorized as belonging to both subcultures. During their interviews, chairpersons Abe, Beth, Clark, Paul, and Rose used collegial terms and concepts such as advocator, counselor, facilitator, mentor, negotiator, peercolleague, researcher, and teacher when relating their experience of their organizational roles. However, they also used bureaucratic terms and concepts such as coordinator, decision-maker, evaluator, organizer, planner, problem-solver, and recruiter. Department heads John, Mark, Ted, and Scott used bureaucratic terms and concepts when describing their experiences such as anticipator, decision-maker, delegator, evaluator, planner, problem-solver, recruiter, and supervisor. However, they also used collegial terms and concepts such as advisor, negotiator, communicator, recommender, representer, mediator, motivator, and teacher.

The two participants who had been chairpersons, but were fulltime administrators at the time of their interview, Dave, the interim dean, and Luke, the division director, also employed a mixture of collegial and bureaucratic terms and concepts when describing their experiences. However, when they spoke of their research role, they characterized this as something belonging to their past. They each explained that they now had little time for a personal research agenda. Similarly, the two longest serving department chairpersons in this study, Abe at 25 years, and Beth at 17 years, also characterized their scholarly research as something rooted in their past, due to the demands of their current administrative work.

## Birnbaum's Model as Organizational Perspective

Judging by how each participant described the ways in which their institution operates, they revealed similarities in organizational perspective that correlate with where they fall within Birnbaum's (1988) nonlinear model of an organization. As Birnbaum asserted, the department chairperson serves as a lynchpin between the overlapping technical (faculty) subsystem and administrative subsystem of an educational organization (Figure 3). While Mintzberg's (1979) organizational model is linear with top-down and bottom-up hierarchies, Birnbaum's subsystems are temporal, fluid, and situational. These subsystems are mutable cohorts relationally described as being loosely or tightly coupled. Participants' views of their workplace conforms to Birnbaum's model, as they described their institutions as complex webs of people with competing and complementary agenda that often confounds tidy notions of positional power. Participants described a reality in which they continually respond to the demands of many subsystems, two of them being their department and their administration.

All participants described their enthusiastic embrace of the teaching and research missions of their institutions. However, participants showed subtle differences in mission focus based on size of institution. Participants from small and medium sized institutions (4-year, M1M3) talked at length about the scholarship of teaching, and the emphasis their institution places on teaching. This suggests that much of their organizational focus faces toward Birnbaum's (1988) technical subsystem. Participants from the larger research institutions (R1-R2), also discussed their institutions' teaching mission, but emphasized their research projects, or the research projects of their colleagues and/or graduate students. Again, this is a perspective that faces toward the technical subsystem. As this subsystem directly enacts an institution's teaching and research missions, participants' focus on the technical subsystem is appropriate in support of
institutional success. It is also a perspective that participants described as comfortable, since their home base is within an academic department.

However, participants also expressed sensitivity to their administration's goal of effectively managing resources. When they discussed the parts of their job dealing with such duties as the efficient use of classroom space, negotiating for new positions, hiring part-time faculty, recruitment, budgeting, terminating programs or majors, and fundraising, they were clear that their obligation to students, parents, and their colleagues includes the sound stewardship of university resources. Participants explained that how they choose to comply with others' demands is primarily determined on an ad hoc basis. Often this means intentionally balancing issues of resource management with those of teaching and research. To use Birnbaum's (1988) lens, in some situations participants are more tightly coupled with their technical subsystem (their department), while on other occasions they will be more tightly coupled with their administrative subsystem. If the demands placed on them by their technical and administrative subsystems are competing, participants explained that they do what they believe is best for the institution in the end.

## Gender and Race

All of the 10 White participants said that they did not perceive their race as affecting their work, or others' expectations of their work. However, of this group, Beth, Clark, Dave, Luke, Mark, and Ted expressed an awareness of their White privilege, and/or the White homogeneousness of their institution or disciplinary domain. It is inconclusive whether the other White participants hold the same view, since they did not volunteer the same information. The experience of the White participants, and White people in general, not feeling hindered by their race correlates with studies suggesting that in Western societies, "Whiteness is a default
standard" (Sue, 2006, p 15); unlike minoritized people, White people are not disadvantaged by, and therefore not reminded of their race on a daily basis (Offerman et al., 2014).

In contrast to the White participants, John, the only participant who is a person of color, said that in his educational and professional life he has often been the only person of color among his colleagues. His response to this, he explained, is to rise above manifest and potential prejudice by concentrating on his work, and by demonstrating his humanity in his dealings with others. John alluded to the intersectionality of his race and gender when expressing his sensitivity to the comfort level of others. He explained that, due to pervasive, negative stereotypes of African American men, he attempts to mitigate situations in which others may misjudge him as threatening.

John's experience is described as the "societal link between Black men and threat/danger" (Cooley, 2019, p. 754) where being Black and male carries a daily burden of demonstrating that one is nonthreatening (Devine \& Elliot, 1995; Eberhardt et al., 2006; Goff et al., 2008; Hurwitz \& Peffley, 1997). White men in western societies do not have to deal with the intersectionality of their race and gender (Cooley, 2019) as John does. Michael Kimmel, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at Stony Brook University, aptly described this phenomenon in relation to own his race and gender when characterizing himself thusly, "I am the generic person. I am a middle class white [sic] man. I have no race, no class, no gender. I am universally generalizable [sic]," (Smith, 2016, para. 6). All eight White male participants said that they did not perceive their gender as affecting their work, or others' expectations of their work. However, of this group, Clark, Dave, Luke, Mark, and Ted expressed an awareness of their male privilege and/or commented on the patriarchal history of higher education.

The two female participants, Beth and Rose, shared their awareness of the historical patriarchy of higher education, but said that they did not believe their gender affected others' expectations of their work or the opportunities afforded to them at their place of work. This is in contrast to studies suggesting that the wider experience of women in academe is one of persistent inequity (Ropers-Huilman \& Reinert, 2016; Johnson, 2017; Judson et al., 2019). However, Beth and Rose both interpreted their caring behaviors towards colleagues and students as being characterized as motherly, which they both saw as a gendered characteristic.

One of these female participants, whose comments pertaining to gender at her institution is not linked to her pseudonym for the sake of confidentiality, explained further. This participant works at a non-coeducational women's institution. Because of this, she explained, her institution has a history of female-dominated faculty and administrators. She believes that this has created an environment where the effects of patriarchy have been somewhat disguised or diluted, and that this might affect her perception of her own gender in the workplace.

## Experience of Frontline Manager Role Over Time

Participants perceive their frontline manager roles as changing over time in two distinct ways. Chairpersons Abe and Beth, department head, John, and interim dean, Dave, referred generally to the increasing complexity of the higher education environment as the prime reason why their roles and others' expectations of them have changed over time. Using this macro, organizational and industrial based perspective, participants cited such elements as increasing federal and state accountability as introducing more paperwork, deadlines, and meetings into their work. However, chairpersons Clark, Paul, and Rose, department heads Mark, Scott, and Ted, and division director Luke, offered a different view. When asked to explore how their roles and others' expectations of them have changed over time, these participants concentrated on
personal growth. Using a micro, individually focused perspective, these participants explained that having spent time in the frontline manager position expanded their awareness of their institution's complexity and afforded them the time to learn to how to respond to others' expectations on a deeper level.

In addition, some participants made connections between past work experience and their current positions. In their interviews, Abe, John, Mark, and Rose volunteered details of their past work experience, such as the management and coordination of academic programs, and cited this as strengthening their ability to meet the demands of their frontline manager responsibilities.

Rose reviewed administrative projects she had successfully stewarded at her institution, and how these experiences grew into additional administrative opportunities. Abe, John, and Mark cited their past employment and service experiences outside of the higher education environment as assisting them in learning how to work effectively with a variety of people.

## Part 2. Analysis of Emergent Themes

## Theme 1: The Call of Duty or, "I Took One for the Team"

All participants found their pathway to the frontline manager position through a sense of personal responsibility that defined and guided their behavior. When examined through the lens of role theory, the participants' prime motivation in embracing and maintaining the department chairperson or department head position involved the conditions of role identity and role expectations. To understand role identity, it is helpful to remember that a role is "the sum total of the culture patterns associated with a particular status or position, and the attitudes, values, and behavior ascribed by the society to any and all persons occupying the status" (Linton, 1945, p. 77). In this instance, the society, or human system, defining each participant's culture patterns is that of their institution and, to a larger extent, the traditions and ethos of higher education.

However, people simultaneously inhabit different roles defined by the different human systems and subsystems to which they belong (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Birnbaum, 1988; Coutu, 1951; Gross et al., 1958; Miner, 1971). As academics, all participants first faced the decision to accept the manager role while owning varied and overlapping workplace role identities based on varied human systems. At the bare minimum, these systems can be identified as (1) membership in the academic collegium, (2) membership in the collegium subgroup defined by tenured status, (3) membership in the collegium subgroup defined by the rank of associate professor or full professor, (4) membership in a professional discipline defined by possessing a terminal degree, (5) membership in a specific institutional network, and (6) membership in an institutional subgroup defined by academic department. These systems and subsystems are comparable to workplace cultures and subcultures as defined by organizational theorists (Birnbaum, 1988; Gerber, 2014; Morgan, 2006). Role identities, with their complementary culture patterns, form each participant's role set, which is "the constellation of relationships with role partners of a particular position" (Merton, 1957, p. 369).

However, role identity is more than membership in a system/subsystem or culture/subculture. Role identity is also "the individual's interpretation of role expectations" (Hardy \& Conway, 1988, p. 165) emanating from such systems. As each system defines acceptable behaviors by consensus (Biddle, 1986), role expectations form as "position-specific norms that identify the attitudes, behaviors, and cognitions required and anticipated for a role occupant" (Hardy \& Conway, 1988, p. 165). When members of a system comply with expected behaviors as defined by their role set, their role conformity is rewarded and reinforced by social acceptance, a sense of belonging, material gain, or social benefits (Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Hardy \& Conway, 1988; Kahn et al., 1964; Linton, 1936, 1945). To understand the participants’
motivation for becoming frontline managers, and their motivation for staying in this position long-term, it is necessary to identify what role expectations led them to the position, and what rewards keep them in the role.

For the six chairpersons and three department heads who were recruited or appointed to the frontline manager position, responding to the call of duty was an acknowledgement of role expectations relayed to them by their colleagues. These colleagues communicated to the participants that they were management material and that their department had a pressing need of their allegiance, talents, and attention. Whether or not these nine participants had entertained thoughts of management prior to their recruitment or appointment, their colleagues' highly positive assessment of their leadership ability helped to define them, and the appeal to serve their department's needs was an appeal to demonstrate their loyalty to their role set. For the one chairperson and one department head who put themselves forward for the position of frontline manager, their stated motivation for doing so was to address a lack of leadership in their respective departments. Their behavior was driven by the belief that they could provide the necessary leadership to restore order and enhance productivity. Thus, for these two participants, the call of duty was their own dissatisfaction and their desire to assist their departments. Since role expectations reflect shared values, such expectations can be self-imposed, as each individual interprets and makes meaning of their own identity (Bess \& Dee, 2012; Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Kahn et al., 1964; Linton, 1945; Van Sell et al., 1981). Moreover, because these two participants were chosen after putting themselves forward for the position, one participant via a department-level election and the other participant through a national job search, their initial, self-imposed role expectation was endorsed and strengthened by other people's belief in their leadership ability. In its most idealized form, the collegium's collective belief is
that higher education exists "for the common good and not for the interests of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole" (AAUP, 2015c, p. 14). For all 11 participants, responding to the call of duty by taking on one of the most difficult jobs in academe was behavior in harmony with the values of their profession.

It is safe to assume that there are many different role expectations inherent in the position of faculty member. The specific role expectation that led the participants to their managerial positions, however, is revealed by how they framed their personal mission. Each participant's personal mission, which is their adoption of the shared values of their workplace cultures, systems, and role set, offers clues as to why they remain in the manager position long-term and the rewards they reap by doing so. In explaining why they became and remain frontline managers, all participants shared their belief that what they do matters, and that their work benefits students, their colleagues, and their institution. Thus, by meeting their role expectations to enact their managerial roles, participants are rewarded and sustained by a strong sense of purpose. Further, another reward for role conformity is avoidance of social pressure (Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Birnbaum, 1988; Coutu, 1951; Gross et al., 1958; Miner, 1971; Nye, 1976). Several participants shared that they have contemplated stepping down from the position, but that no one else in their department wishes to take on the role. This suggests that these participants remain in the position because they feel tacitly pressured to do so by their department colleagues. If this were true, this condition would not negate these participants' dedication to their personal mission. Instead, this would indicate that their motivations for staying in the frontline manager position encompass both the rewards of fulfilling their personal mission coupled with the avoidance of social pressure.

## Theme 2: Power and Authority or, "Policy is a Warm Blanket"

When describing their experiences of conflict involving power and authority participants turned to shared values, organizational power structures, and rules to guide their behavior. In interpreting this approach from the perspective of organizational role conflict, it is helpful to review how role theory relates to organizational theory with regard to locus of authority and the formalization of processes. Role theorists maintain that a person's behavior within a human system is influenced by the position, or status, afforded to that person as defined by that system (Ashforth, 2001; Biddle, 1979, 1986; Biddle \& Thomas, 1966; Gross et al., 1958; Hardy \& Conway, 1988; Linton, 1936, 1945; Nye, 1976). Organizational theorists, however, maintain that organizations formalize people's behavior by defining and enforcing rules, such as policy, and standardizing processes, such as establishing workflows and procedures (Birnbaum, 1988; Bjork, 1975; Katz \& Kahn, 1978; Manning, 2018; Mintzberg 1979). While role theorists base locus of authority on the shared values and practices of a system or culture, organizational theorists focus on the formalization of work processes and the enforcement of rules that, in turn, establishes locus of authority. In describing where they located personal and/or institutional authority when challenged by others in fulfilling their duties as frontline managers, participants turned toward the rules and formalization inherent in their position to enacting their roles.

Participants shared stories of conflict in which department colleagues questioned or actively challenged their authority. In these situations, the participants were confronted with interrole conflict, which happens when "an individual perceives that others hold different expectations for him as the incumbent of two or more positions" (Gross et al., 1958, p. 249). Specifically, participants had assumed authority that their challengers believed they did not possess because these challengers saw them as peers and not as managers. In responding to such
disputes, participants represented themselves in the role of agents of the institution who were enacting the policy, or rules, inherent in their frontline manager role. This phenomenon is illustrated by one participant's role conflict with a colleague who had been at their institution for a very long time. For this chairperson was required to evaluate the coursework of a senior colleague by observing their class, and interrole conflict was manifest when the senior colleague indicated that they did not wish the chairperson to evaluate their teaching. In this situation, the seniority status of the colleague collided with the managerial status of the chairperson. To appreciate this chairperson's interrole conflict, it is helpful to review their status from their colleague's point of view. Using the organizational theorist's perspective, the senior colleague's objection can be interpreted as a rejection of the chairperson's managerial role specifically, and of the course evaluation policy in general. It is likely that the senior colleague would have rejected having their classroom monitored by anyone, since the collegium places great emphasis on faculty autonomy and academic freedom. Using the role theorist's perspective, the senior colleague did not recognize the chairperson's managerial role, viewing the chairperson as legitimately occupying the faculty member role with no special authority to evaluate a senior colleague's work. Thus, the chairperson's enactment of their manager role challenged the senior colleague's faculty values and locus of authority.

However, the formalized role of course evaluator had been bestowed upon the chairperson by the institution. The chairperson was caught between enacting the course evaluation policy and remaining on good terms with their senior colleague. Further, enacting this policy also challenged the chairperson's own role identity as a faculty peer in the department. Thus, the chairperson's interrole conflict, while involving another person, was also an internal struggle. To resolve this issue, the chairperson managed to maintain role conformity as a faculty
member while still enacting the duties of a frontline manager. In discussing this disagreement, the chairperson said to their senior colleague, "Hey, this is in the handbook. This is not me; this is the handbook. I'm doing this for everybody. It's not just you. I'm not trying to sit in your class because I want to watch you."

In this situation, the chairperson mitigated the conflict by offering the senior colleague a macro view of the situation with the reminder that course evaluation was an institutional quality control initiative and that performing evaluations was not a personal whim, but a managerial requirement. In so doing, the chairperson was encouraging their colleague to recognize their administrative role. As Birnbaum (1988) and Morgan (2006) noted, unless challenged by another cultural perspective, one's own culture is inconspicuous and taken for granted. In essence, the chairperson offered their colleague the opportunity to look beyond departmental politics to see the bureaucracy's resource management perspective and recognize the power structure within their institution. In addition, by stating, "This is not me; this is the handbook," the chairperson also maintained their faculty identity by offloading authority onto an institutional rule.

Even for participants occupying the department head position, which has been identified by some as a role assigned more authority than that of department chairperson (Is There Any, 2014; Porter, 1961), establishing locus of authority involved reminding colleagues of role obligations, formalization of processes, and rule enforcement. One department head who had terminated a department colleague's program said to their colleague, "You see negative return on investment, meaning none, or that we're actually spending money? If this were your budget to manage, what would you do?" In this instance, the department head reported no feelings of interrole conflict. However, by posing this question, the department head invited his colleague to take a broader view by seeing the situation through a bureaucratic lens. Rather than offloading
locus of authority onto a rule or separate authority figure, the department head owned the authority. However, the department head attempted in good faith to explain that this authority was not enacted capriciously. By asking his colleague," If this were your budget to manage, what would you do?" the department head framed his decision as an inevitability of the responsibilities that would be assigned to any person in the department head role. In this way, the department head established his authority by explaining that he was meeting his role expectations as the financial steward of his department.

## Theme 3: Interruption and Distraction or, "Keep Your Own Calendar"

In describing the competing and compounding duties and obligations inherent in their frontline manager role, participants experienced phenomena known as role overload and role ambiguity. One of the greatest stressors of the participants' environment was the high level of interruption by those in their role set and the ensuing distraction that pulled them in different directions. In reporting this role overload, which can be described as "having too many role demands and too little time and resources to fulfill them" (Coverman, 1989, p. 967), participants reported the same demanding working conditions reported in the literature on chairperson role conflict. All participants also experienced cascading, unanticipated demands placed on them by others, which resulted in their experience of role ambiguity, "a condition in which expectations are incomplete or insufficient to guide behavior" (Biddle, 1986, p. 83). As demonstrated by their experiences, the participants' time in seat as frontline managers did not shield them from the role overload and role ambiguity reported in the literature for all chairpersons. However, as long-term managers, participants had learned how to respond to their role overload, and prepare for situations of role ambiguity by using strategies that alleviated their role conflict.

The fragmented, demanding, and equivocal work environment described in the literature on chairperson role conflict is role stress, which is "a social structural condition in which role obligations are difficult, unanticipated, conflicting, or impossible to meet. Role stress is "a characteristic of the social system, not a person in the system" (Hardy \& Conway, 1988, p. 165). One participant shared that, to the uninitiated, "the sheer volume and complexity of the work would blow their minds." Participants reported responding to interruption and distraction by tolerating it. However, they also selectively limited their availability to others by adjusting their work schedule, removing themselves from the department, or by closing their office door. They employed these strategies to find the time to attend to their duties uninterrupted, but also to reduce their role strain, which is "a subjective state of emotional arousal in response to external conditions of social stress" (Hardy \& Conway, 1988, p. 165). Further, such interruption and distraction was also the result of issues related to the participants' hybrid roles as faculty members and managers. Division of labor, status, and identity within a human system is formalized by positions held within that system, which are enacted through roles (Birnbaum, 1988; Mintzberg, 1976). Enacting the hybrid roles of manager and teacher required the participants to negotiate their availability while juggling their hybrid roles as teachers and managers. As one department head said, "I have no problem telling a student, 'Look, I'm meeting with someone, come back in an hour.' But I'm not just going to shut them out."

Participants reported the experience of role ambiguity when they were caught off guard by unexpected individual or departmental obligations. Often these obligations appeared as lastminute demands from upper administration. One chairperson shared, "After being in the job a while, I have a better idea of what happens and when, and that makes me better in terms of longterm planning." Long term planning, however, can be altered and confounded by the
unanticipated agenda and urgency of other people. As one chairperson remarked, "There's always a level of uncertainty for everyone. New systems and priorities are introduced and dropped, and different people are going to have a say in changing policies." In response to these conditions, the participants kept on top of known responsibilities to leave wiggle room for the unanticipated. One common tool used to achieve this aim was a calendar. "If you want to keep track of all that stuff," said one chairperson, "keep your own calendar, because you can't always rely on the college to tell you." From the perspective of role theory, the participants appreciated the role stress of their environment. They have learned ways of dealing with their role overload and role ambiguity in order to reduce their role strain and meet the role expectations placed on them by their role set.

## Theme 4: Reframing the Roadblocks or, "I Adapt and Overcome"

Participants adopted the specific reframing behaviors of embracing humor and practicing empathy when asked to reflect on their role conflict. Reframing negative thoughts is a coping strategy that builds resiliency against challenging circumstances (Hart et al., 2014; Kalliath \& Kalliath, 2014; Rice \& Liu, 2016). Positive, non-hostile humor and empathy for others facilitate positive reframing (Hodges \& Klein, 2001; Samson \& Gross, 2012). Hughes et al, (2011) explained,

Negative self-talk is often an automatic reaction to stressful events. Reframing is a coping technique that assists one in becoming aware of one's internal monologue; reframing widens one's perspective of particularly challenging situations. Steps involved in reframing include becoming aware of one's thoughts, evaluating content, and challenging negative perceptions by questioning their validity. (Hughes et al., 2011, p. 36)

Positive humor has been shown to mitigate the effects of role overload and role ambiguity (den Broeck et al., 2012; Wallace et al., 2010). When interpreted through the lens of role theory, the participants' use of humor is a way to first recognize and then diffuse their role strain. This coping behavior has afforded them the resiliency to deal long-term with their role strain. As one chairperson said of themselves, "I adapt and overcome."

Practicing empathy for others is role taking, which is defined as understanding the cognitive and affective dimensions of another person's point of view, regardless of one's own positive or negative feelings towards that other person (Coutu, 1951; Johnson, 1975; Mead, 1934/1962). Research studies on role taking conducted in the 1950s focused on attempts to identify empathy as a personality trait. However, these quantitative studies were demonstrated to be flawed (Biddle, 1986: Cronbach, 1955; Gage \& Cronbach, 1955). Later investigations focused on conflating the two terms (role taking and empathy) rather than examining possible distinctions between the two constructs. Notable studies do exist, such as Bird et al. (1982) who investigated work-life balance and found that empathy mitigated role conflict by increasing role conformity and thus, role reward, and Stensland and Landsman's (2017) study of burnout among hospice workers which suggested that a lack of empathy increased the workers' role strain. However, Jiang and Lu (2020), in their comprehensive critical review of the literature on empathy and leadership, noted that in spite of empathy being valued in the academic community, there is still a great need for research into how empathy is incorporated into the practice of academic leadership. I have adopted the practice of contemporary researchers by conflating the terms, empathy and role taking, in my analysis of the participants' behaviors. Whether or not role taking has allowed the participants to remain in their frontline manager roles long-term is not demonstrated in this study. However, since all the participants demonstrated role taking in
describing their role conflict, this suggests that the relationship between the practice of empathy and long-term frontline academic management should be further explored.

## Theme 5: Support Systems or, "Find Yourself a Council"

In describing their experiences of mentorship, participants reported the active part they played in cultivating relationships that assisted them in learning new role expectations. However, these relationships did more than teach them about new duties and responsibilities; such relationships also provided them with a sense of belonging and role identity. As people responding to the hybrid role expectations of the collegium and bureaucracy, the participants were open to forming close associations with people from both of these subcultures/subsystems. Thus, in negotiating their dual identities as faculty members and managers, participants formed mentoring relationships with fellow frontline mangers, faculty members, and fulltime administrators. This is reasonable behavior, as the participants' role set includes people from both subcultures/subsystems. It is worth highlighting that these relationships crisscross the "levels of graded authority" (Weber, 1902/1946, p. 197) within the institutional hierarchy, as it is an expression of the academic frontline manager's role a link in the chain of command between the collegium and bureaucracy. However, looking beyond linear structures such as Mintzberg (1979), and, instead, examining these mentoring relationships from a nonlinear perspective allows us to arrive at a more nuanced interpretation.

Organizational theorists employing nonlinear perspectives, such as Birnbaum (1988) and Weick (1976), made the same claim as linear theorists, such as Mintzberg (1979), for the frontline manger's liminal place within the organizational hierarchy. However, Birnbaum (1988), building on Weick (1976), described the organization as a series of ever-changing interlocking subsystems bound together by policies, goals, and agenda. These subsystems are not strictly
defined by a single role identity, job title, or hierarchical status. Rather, they are defined by coupling elements, or variables, in the form of perspectives, policies, or priorities related to shared goals. While subsystems that are tightly coupled describe groups that operate with strongly shared variables, loosely coupled subsystems share "few variables or weak variables" (Weick, 1976, p. 3). Thus, when one department head explained that his mentors are "a group of more experienced faculty members who have previously been administrators or have been with the college for a very long time," he was describing a group of people with experience of the collegium and bureaucracy subcultures who are tightly coupled by mutual regard and shared interests.

One of the participants, who had been a department chairperson but became a fulltime administrator, shared his recommendation to "make sure you have a mentor for your new department chairs. Either the dean themselves could do the mentoring, or perhaps you could find another chair to be the mentor." In making this recommendation, the participant cited both peers and supervisors as possible mentors. Presumably, having mentors holding both job titles could provide the frontline manager with a greater breadth of information and a wider variety of institutional perspectives. Birnbaum (1988) and Weick (1976) emphasized the importance of loosely coupled subsystems in affording people the freedom to construct creative responses to changing circumstances. However, tightly coupled subsystems of mentors with various subculture affiliations has great potential to provide the frontline manager with realistic advice and counsel pertaining to their demanding duties, and validation of their multiple role identities and role expectations.

Not all the participants, however, referred to an eclectic group of people when talking about their mentors. Many remembered that their first mentor was their previous department
chairperson. These participants suffered role strain from role ambiguity, especially in the early stages of their manager experience. Role ambiguity is endemic to an environment of rapid change and organizational complexity (Biddle, 1986; Nyanga, et al., 2012). However, it can also be the result of poor training or a lack of training (Beauchamp et al., 2005; Ranzijn, 2004; Singleton, 1987; Wright, 2008). Participants discussed the need for new frontline mangers to be trained, citing their own lack of training in the early years of their manager experience. As one chairperson shared, "Before I became chair, I think that I didn't know what I didn't know."

## Summary

In this chapter, I presented my analysis of the study findings in two parts through (1) narrative review and (2) theme analysis. I began the first part of this chapter with a narrative review of the participants' stories presented in Chapter 4. As my method of situating these findings within an historical and cultural context, I examined these data in conjunction with the organizational models, organizational roles, and organizational subcultures described in the Chapter 2 literature review. I also referred to new material in my examination of participants’ race and gender. In the second part of this chapter, I presented an analysis of the themes presented in Chapter 5. As my method of uncovering the shared experiences of the participants’ organizational role conflict, I related these data to the theoretical framework of role theory and organizational theory as described in the Chapter 2 literature review.

## CHAPTER 7

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate, describe, and interpret how long-term chairpersons and long-term department heads conceptualize, process, and negotiate their hybrid role as administrators and faculty members in higher education, and how they reconcile the work of their academic departments with broader institutional concerns. The experiences concerned were generally defined as working within universities or colleges with various stakeholders such as students, faculty members, administrators, staff, and external stakeholders. In this study I interviewed five long-term department chairpersons, four long-term department heads, and two former long-term department chairpersons working at universities and colleges located in Indiana, Illinois, and Massachusetts to describe and analyze their experiences of organizational role conflict. I recruited the study participants through criterion sampling for tenured or tenuretrack faculty status at four-year or higher non-profit colleges or universities, and experience in the department chairperson or department head position for at least 6 consecutive years or longer. Participant demographics varied by gender, race, age, disciplinary expertise, length of academic career, rank, institution type, and position title. In-depth, semi-structured interviews served as the primary basis for data collection. Four participants were interviewed by telephone. Seven participants were interviewed in-person. I presented these data by employing a
hermeneutic phenomenological approach to describe the participants' stories and to develop five themes and eight subthemes describing the participants' organizational role conflict.

This chapter begins with a discussion of how this study contributes to the knowledge base on department chairperson organizational role conflict by presenting and examining this conflict from the long-term chairperson and long-term department head's perspective using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach not widely applied to this research topic. I then present the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study, followed by recommendations for future research.

## Importance of the Study

Calabrese and Page (2010) explained, "For the most part, research ideas and questions are likely to be interesting to other scholars if they address puzzling issues or unsolved mysteries, or . . . if they lead to concrete solutions to difficult educational problems" (p. 103). In this study, I have examined a known problem of academic management by turning to two deficiencies in our understanding of the department chairperson's organizational role conflict. First, people who have occupied this frontline manager role long-term have been ignored as a focus of research. This study addresses this oversight, as it is an examination of the organizational role conflict of the long-term department chairperson and long-term department head. Second, across six decades, of chairperson role conflict has been investigated by researchers using a quantitative or mixed methods research paradigm. This study adds to the small but growing body of qualitative research regarding chairperson role conflict to examine the subject on a deeper, more elemental level. A phenomenological investigation, such as this one, can help to "determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). If we accept Creswell and Poth's
(2017) assertion that "knowing these common experiences can be valuable for groups such as therapists, teachers, health personnel, and policy makers" (p.162), then this study will provide new information on the long-term experience of chairperson organizational role conflict for those making recruitment and training decisions concerning one of the most problematic managerial positions in higher education.

## Assumptions of the Study

As Creswell and Poth (2018) explained, "Like the loom on which fabric is woven, general assumptions and interpretive frameworks hold qualitative research together" (p. 97). To understand my study findings and my analyses of these data, it is necessary for me to share the premises on which I based my research. Five assumptions guided this study. My first assumption was that examining the lived experiences of a limited number of academics would generate data sufficient to describe how department chairpersons and department heads negotiate the organizational role conflict that is a recognized component of these organizational positions. Moreover, given the large body of empirical evidence of department chairpersons' role conflict, my second assumption was that the study participants would have experienced role conflict, and that this conflict would relate to their organizational and cultural place within their college or university.

Although the positions of department chairperson and department head can encompass differences in hierarchical and cultural foci, my third assumption was that such differences are not significant enough to alter the experience of such persons' organizational role conflict. However, to practice transparency, I did differentiate between chairperson and department head comments when reporting my study findings to allow the reader more control in accessing these comments. My fourth assumption was my belief that participants who agreed to be included in
this study did so, in part, because of a genuine desire to uncover information about their role conflict as long-term frontline managers in academe. Lastly, my fifth and final assumption was that longer terms for department chairpersons specifically, and frontline managers generally, provide institutions of higher learning with continuity of leadership, and that such continuity of leadership may contribute to institutional success. In the absence of empirical evidence, some in the literature have suggested anecdotally that longer terms of service for chairpersons make for efficacious academic leadership. This assumption, however, has not been demonstrated scientifically.

## Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

In accessing my study findings and analyses, it is worth noting that "all studies have limitations; they need to be acknowledged" (Calabrese \& Smith, 2010, p. 95). Lunenburg and Irby (2008) reminded us that, "Limitations of a study are not under the control of the researcher. Limitations are factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings" (p.133). The two limitations of this study were (1) researcher bias, and (2) participants' transparency. Delimitations, however, "are self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study" (Lunenburg \& Irby, 2008, p. 134). The two delimitations of this study are (1) institution region and type, and (2) participant homogeny.

## Researcher Bias

The first limitation of this study was that, as a former department chairperson, I might have unthinkingly filtered data collection, analysis, and interpretation through my own biases. In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher uses bracketing to put aside her own perspectives and beliefs temporarily to cultivate "an attitude open enough to let unexpected meanings [to] emerge" (Chan et al., 2013, p. 1). However, I adopted a hermeneutic approach. Bracketing is
rejected in hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 2015) because of the researcher's recognition that subjectivity is inherent in the research process (Gadamer, 1975; Heidegger, 1933/1962; van Manen, 2015). Therefore, in lieu of bracketing, the hermeneutic researcher rigorously develops a "critical self-awareness of their own subjectivity, vested interests, predilections and assumptions and is conscious of how these might impact on the research process and findings" (Finlay, 2009, p. 12). Gadamer (1975) wrote,

This kind of sensitivity [on the part of the researcher] involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness [sic] and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings. (pp. 268-269)

As a qualitative researcher, I recognized my "role in constructing the social realities" (Gall et al., 2002, p. 14) of the phenomenon I studied. While engaging with the study participants and the research data, I employed a process of mindful affinity, called intersubjectivity, which is "empathy, a thereness-for-me of others" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 37). Phenomenology "is a lived experience for researchers as they attune themselves towards the ontological nature of phenomenon while learning to see pre-reflective, taken-for-granted, and essential understandings through the lens of their always already pre-understandings and prejudices" (Kafle, 2011, p. 188). Hermeneutic phenomenology is "self-critical and intersubjective" (van Manen, 2015, p. 11) and requires the researcher to engage in research rooted in a deep, empathetic connection with study participants (Kafle, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2015). Contrary to putting aside or bracketing my thoughts and feelings, I was duty bound to explicate my own experiences and opinions as a faculty member and chairperson in higher education. By rigorously employing
the hermeneutic circle, I engaged "in a dialectic between the preunderstandings of the research process, the interpretive framework and the sources of information" (Koch, 1995, p. 835). It is critical to note, however, that while employing self-reflection and intersubjectivity, I most certainly have unconsciously allowed my biases to affect data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

## Participants' Transparency

The second limitation of this study was my reliance on the self-awareness and forthrightness of the study participants in sharing their true thoughts and feelings with me. Crowther et al. (2017) explained,

As hermeneutic researchers, we enter the interview space assuming that the story shared by a participant is an account of their understanding of their experience yet acknowledging that the whole story will never be told or heard; truth is never fully revealed. Cases of exaggerating or minimizing therefore speak to what is felt as important and understood by the teller to emphasize in any given moment; how they choose to 'appear' is integral to the story. The researcher can thus never know the thinking of the participant and capture the past exactly as it happened (Koch, 1998). Nor, for that matter, can the person themselves." (p. 829)

I was aware of the possibility that some participants might have altered their interview responses when communicating unpleasant, highly politicized, or private information. I mitigated some of these issues by adhering to established and systematic observational and interview protocols (DeWalt \& DeWalt, 2010; Rubin \& Rubin, 2012) and by employing a rigorous code of care for the study participants (Hays \& Singh, 2012). Specifically, in presenting study findings, I promised to guard their confidentiality by refraining from sharing identifying
details of their interview responses. This practice extended to not linking their verbatim comments and details of their conflict stories to their pseudonym.

## Institution Region and Type

Although my intent was not generalization but rather, to understand a phenomenon indepth, the first delimitation of this study was that, with the exception of one participant from Massachusetts, my research included participants from only two Midwestern states, Illinois and Indiana. I had set a geographic limitation on my in-person interviews due to my inability to travel long distances. Thus, this is not a study encompassing a cross-section of academic frontline managers throughout the United States. Further, because I did not limit my recruitment of participants to type or size of non-profit college or university, no relationships can be drawn in this study between role conflict and the size or type of academic institution. In addition, it was my decision, with the approval of my dissertation committee, to include long-term department heads in this study of predominantly long-term department chairpersons.

## Participant Homogeneity

The second delimitation of this study is that the cohort of participants was not racially diverse, and that one gender was overrepresented. Of the 11 study participants, only one participant was a person of color, and only two participants were women. While the interview protocol included race and gender questions, this study was not an in-depth examination of the frontline manager's race or gender identity, nor was it an examination of the intersectionality of race and gender in academic life. In addition, only one participant was an expert in the humanities, while the other participants were natural scientists, theoretical scientists, and social scientists. Thus, this study did not include an examination of the manager's experience of role conflict related to their disciplinary subcultures. My decision to cease recruiting participants in
spite of this homogeneity was based on my decision that saturation was reached by the eighth participant out of a total of 11 participants.

## Recommendations for Further Research

Investigating the lived experiences of department chairpersons and department heads who deal long-term with their organizational role conflict can inform our understanding of academic frontline managers who are or have been taken for granted in higher education. Such studies have the potential to uncover new understanding of people who provide continuity of leadership in one of the most challenging management positions in higher education. Because of this absence of in-depth research on long-term academic frontline managers, there are many opportunities for further research. As the first investigation of the long-term chairperson and department head's organizational role conflict, this study can be replicated in new contexts.

The majority of the participants in this study are White, and predominantly from institutions in the Midwest. The lack of racial diversity in this study, in particular, suggests that the organizational role conflict of frontline academic managers who are people of color needs to be investigated. The intersectionality of social categorizations in relation to the academic longterm frontline manager's role conflict is an avenue well worth exploring. In general, future research should examine the organizational role conflict of long-term chairpersons and/or department heads as defined by race, ethnicity, age, or location. As this study included participants from a variety of institutions, further research could explore the subject by institution type and size.

All of the participants in this study presented themselves within a gender binary model, and only two of the 11 identified as female. Although the participants' gender identities was not a part of this investigation, future research should examine the experiences of female academic
frontline managers in relation to organizational, societal, and family role conflict. In similar vein, research is needed on the role conflict of academic frontline managers who identify as LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual or aromantic, and other queer-identifying identities).

This study employed hermeneutic phenomenology as the research methodology, which "provides glimpses of the meanings that reside within human experience" (Crowther et al., 2017, p. 826). Further research on the subject employing alternate qualitative or quantitative research methods has the potential to build a strong foundation of understanding into long-term chairperson role conflict. Moreover, in-depth studies examining the similarities and differences between the organizational role conflict of the department chairperson versus that of the department head are also needed since, as this study suggests, distinctions made of the experiential aspects of these two positions are not always clear-cut. Since the long-term academic frontline manager has been a neglected area of research, studies on other management issues experienced by these people, outside of organizational role conflict, should also be explored. If those in academe truly believe, as has been asserted, that the role played by department chairpersons is critical to the contemporary college and university, there is a wide open field of future research on long-term chairperson experience that is awaiting them.

## Implications for Practice

The study participants' need for more organized, systematic, and consistent training mirrored the experiences of most academic frontline managers in higher education. In spite of Tucker's (1981) early efforts to devise suitable training for department chairpersons, there is still a lack of stable institutional support for chairperson professional development (Aziz et al., 2005; Burke et al., 2015; Freeman et al., 2020; Gmelch, 2015; Gmelch \& Miskin, 2004; Gonaim, 2016;

Rothgeb et al., 2007; Wilson et al., 2013). There now exists an abundance of training material for the department chairperson that is informed by decades of empirical research. Moreover, over the years, external networking and mentoring events have been established in response to this need for training such as the American Council on Education's Leadership Academy for Department Chairs, the annual Academic Chairpersons Conference, organized by Kansas State University, and the SUNY (State University of New York) SAIL Institute's Department Chair Academy. Yet, in spite of the such resources, chairpersons continue to report feeling unprepared for their administrative duties (Freeman et al., 2020; Gmelch, 2015), suggesting that this dearth of management training is not due to substandard instructional material or missing external training opportunities but, rather, results from incomplete and inconsistent implementation at the institutional level.

In a recent, comprehensive study of the chairperson experience, participants reported that when their institutions do provide training, greater emphasis is placed on outlining procedural duties at the expense of reviewing personnel management and conflict resolution (Freeman et al., 2020). Also affecting the quality of frontline managers' professional development is that ongoing institutional support for mentoring programs and training sessions is a priority that often gets pushed aside by daily demands (Freeman et al., 2020; Gmelch, 2015). Therefore, in addition to offering frontline managers the freedom to form their own mentoring and networking relationships, funding for external training, and the provision of preexisting training materials, institutions should seek lasting change by placing more accountability on the institution to provide support. The types of measures that could address such a mission are:

- Conducting in-house annual orientation programs for new frontline managers, and annual programs for all frontline mangers,
- holding informal monthly gatherings for all frontline mangers across campus to share information and build community,
- establishing an institution-wide management mentoring program,
- administering annual, anonymized surveys to campus frontline managers to regularly gauge their training and support needs,
- assigning the organization of professional development for frontline mangers as an official duty of college-level administrators, such as college deans,
- addressing frontline management training as an evaluation metric in the performance reviews of top administrators,
- consulting the board of directors for advice on, and support for managing sustained professional development initiatives for frontline managers.


#### Abstract

All academic frontline managers, regardless of their level of administrative experience, need more frequent and robust training. I hope that my study, added to the many preexisting investigations into the department chairperson's role conflict, will be a call to action for more sustained institutional commitment to supporting the work of the department chairperson and department head.


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## APPENDIX A: SOLICITATION EMAIL

Dear Dr. X.
I would like to request an hour of your time to interview you as part of my dissertation research in educational administration. You have been identified as a faculty member who has had at least 6 years serving as a department chairperson. My dissertation topic is about the organizational role conflict of department chairpersons who have been in the position 6 years or longer. This interview, and your identity, would be confidential. If you agree to participate, I am happy to share the interview questions with you beforehand.

Would you consider being a part of my research?
Regards,
Susan M. Frey, MS, MLS
Doctoral Candidate
Indiana State University
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

## APPENDIX B: SOLICITATION TELEPHONE TRANSCRIPT

Hello Dr. X. My name is Susan Frey. How are you today? I am a doctoral candidate at Indiana State University and I am in the initial stages of my dissertation research. I am studying in the Department of Educational Leadership pursuing a doctorate in Educational Administration. My dissertation topic is about the organizational role conflict of department chairperson who have been in the position 6 years or longer. I would like to know if you would be willing to participate in my research. Specifically, what I am asking for is an opportunity to interview you about your experiences as a department chair. If you agree to participate, I can easily provide you with a list of the questions that I will ask following this phone call. Additionally, you should know that all responses will be kept confidential. No participant in this study will be reasonably identifiable, as pseudonyms will be used for yourself and your institution. Would you be willing to participate in an interview? [If no] Thank you for your time. [If yes] Thank you for agreeing to participate. What would be a good date for the interview? May I send you additional information (informed consent and, if asked, interview questions). If you need to contact me, please call me at XXX XXX XXXX or e-mail me at susan.frey@indstate.edu.

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION

## Dear Dr. X

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my dissertation research. I want to confirm that we have agreed to meet at (time) on (day), (date) (month), (year) at (location). Attached please find a letter of informed consent. I ask that you read over this letter prior to the interview. If you have any questions about it, please feel free to contact me or ask me at our appointed interview time. I will collect the signed consent form at our interview. Additionally, I have included a copy of the interview questions for your review. As stated in the consent letter, you are at liberty to decline answering any question. Thank you again for your willingness to participate in my study.

Regards,
Susan Frey

## APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

# CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH 

## Organizational Role Conflict: The Lived Experience of the Long-Term Department Chairperson in Higher Education

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Susan Frey, under the guidance of Dr. Joshua Powers, from the Department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. This dissertation research is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and understand how long-term department chairpersons conceptualize, process, and negotiate their hybrid role as administrators and faculty members in higher education, and how such people reconcile the work of their academic departments with broader institutional concerns. These experiences are generally defined as working within their institutions with internal stakeholders such as students, faculty members, administrators, and staff and their experiences with external stakeholders such as parents, alumni, local community members, and other scholars in their discipline not working at the same institution.

## PROCEDURES

You have been asked to participate in this study because you currently work in a four-year, nonprofit college or university, and are a faculty member who is currently serving as a department chairperson with 6 or more consecutive years in this administrative role. The study will include interviews of approximately 6-10 participants. The interview will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours to complete. A short follow-up interview may be requested. The interview will be recorded only to assist the researcher with information recall.

## POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The risks to you are considered minimal, although the interview questions may evoke some degree of emotion for you, given that this study focuses on organizational role conflict.

## POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Organizational role conflict occurs when employees take on separate and divergent organizational roles that have the potential to cause them stress. It is a widely studied variable in the social science literature. Because of the well-documented personal and professional toll that serving as department chairperson can exert on an individual, many faculty shy away from accepting the chairperson position or step down from the position within three years. Investigating the lived experiences of faculty/administrators who deal long-term with the organizational role conflict that is identified as being an integral part of the position can inform our understanding of a subgroup of people who have been largely ignored by the research community. Since department chairpersons with strong administrative and leadership skills are essential to the successful functioning and ongoing improvement of colleges and universities, examining their organizational role conflict may uncover new information on a group of faculty/administrators who provide continuity of leadership in higher education.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Your interview will be audio recorded and identified with a pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality. The audio recording with pseudonym identification will be transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. Field notes and documents supplied by you, such as a curriculum vitae, will be secured in a locked cabinet maintained by the researcher. The master list linking pseudonyms and study participants will be secured in a second locked cabinet maintained by the researcher. The informed consent and validated demographic data will be secured in a third locked cabinet maintained by the researcher. The audio files of the interview, in which you will be addressed by your pseudonym, will be password protected and encrypted and will reside on the hard drive of a password-protected laptop. All interview materials will be kept locked up for 3 years and then destroyed.

## PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

## IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research please contact Susan Frey at XX
Street, Town, IN 46703, 812-XXX-XXX-XXXX, susan.frey@indstate.edu, or Susan Frey’s
faculty advisor, Dr. Joshua Powers at Indiana State University, 621 Chestnut Street, Terre Haute, IN, 812-237-8378, joshua.powers@indstate.edu.

## RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University (ISU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

## APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographic Data: From personal records such as curriculum vitae, position descriptions, and academic department materials provided by and confirmed by the participant.

Name
Address
Email Address

Birthdate

Gender

Department
Number of years as a faculty member
Number of years as a chairperson
Number of separate terms as a chairperson
Open Interview Questions:
Organizational/Professional Identities

1. Imagine you were to describe what you do for your job to someone who knew nothing about higher education. What would you tell them? As you reflect on this question, think about all that you do.
2. If you were to provide labels or categories for what you just described, what would they be and why?
3. As a proportion of your time and energy deployment, what percentage would you assign to each and why?

## Experiencing and Navigating Faculty and Chairperson Roles and Expectations

4. Informed by what you just shared, I'd like to now go deeper. How do your faculty see the role of department chairperson and its expectations, and how do you know or infer this?
5. How does your dean see the role of department chairperson and its expectations, and how do you know or infer this?
6. How does the university central administration see the role of department chairperson and its expectations, and how do you know or infer this?
7. Have you ever been confused or unclear about your responsibilities as a chairperson? If yes, can you describe an example or two?
8. Have you ever experienced a conflict between the expectations of your dean or the university administration for you in your chairperson capacity with those of your faculty? If yes, can you describe an example or two, and how you attempted to resolve it?
Making Sense of Roles and Expectations Over Time
9. What led you to pursue the chairperson position?
10. Were there moments when you considered stepping down, and if yes, what led you to feel that way? What keeps you in the role now?
11. How has your thinking about the department chairperson role, and its expectations vis-svis your other identities, [including with respect to your gender and race/ethnicity], as well as the expectations that others have of you, evolved over time?
12. If you had to pick an alternative title or metaphor for the chairperson position, what would it be?
13. What advice might you offer persons considering a chairperson position with respect to navigating professional identities and role conflict?
14. What advice might you offer deans or the central administration with respect to helping department chairs navigate professional identities and role conflict?

# APPENDEX F: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL 

DATE: March 5, 2019

| TO: | Susan Frey, MS, MLS |
| :--- | :--- |
| FROM: | Indiana State University Institutional Review Board |

STUDY TITLE: [1369778-2] Organizational Role Conflict: The Lived Experience of the Long-term Department Chairperson in Higher Education

SUBMISSION TYPE:Revision
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: March 5, 2019
EXPIRATION DATE: March 4, 2022
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category \# 6, 7
Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this research study. The Indiana State University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. The approval for this study expires on March 4, 2022.

Prior to the approval expiration date, if you plan to continue this study you will need to submit a continuation request (Form E) for review and approval by the IRB. Additionally, once you complete your study, you will need to submit the Completion of Activities report (Form G).

This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.
Informed Consent: Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. NOTE: You must use the electronically stamped informed consent document that has been uploaded into IRBNet.

Reporting of Problems: All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported. Any problems involving risk to subjects or others, injury or other adverse effects experienced by subjects, and incidents of noncompliance must be reported to the IRB Chairperson or Vice Chairperson via phone or e-mail immediately. Additionally, you must submit Form F electronically to the IRB through IRBNet within 5 working days after first awareness of the problem.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

Modifications: Any modifications to this proposed study or to the informed consent form will need to be submitted using Form D for review and approval by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years. If those research records involve health information, those records must be retained for a minimum of six years.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Anne Foster within IRBNet by clicking on the study title on the "My Projects" screen and the "Send Project Mail" button on the left side of the "New Project Message" screen. I wish you well in completing your study.

