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CHOOSING THE NEXT BEST PRESIDENT: ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS OR CEREMONIAL RITUAL? AN ETHNOGRAPHIC LOOK AT THE INNER DYNAMICS OF PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH COMMITTEES AT TWO COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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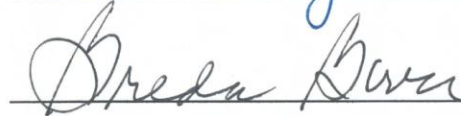
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BY

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B.A., Political Science, Michigan State University, 1973
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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December, 2010

DEDICATION

For Linda, without whom this journey was not possible

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And finally, Dad, I am sorry you aren't here to see this.

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ABSTRACT

Over the coming years an increasing number of college presidencies will change hands. Choice of a new president who will effectively lead an institution is a decision of great importance to individuals within the organization and to the community the college serves. Most colleges employ a search process composed of representatives of key constituent groups to help identify and choose the new president. Yet, numerous participants in this activity and researchers have suggested that the academic search process has become more of a symbolic ritual than a process that effectively and consistently chooses the best candidates for executive leadership. A singular issue in the search process is the continued domination of presidential suites by white males (*The*

American College President, 2007) contrary to changing demographics of student and national populations. For the most part, the search process has resisted examination partly because of issues of confidentiality and partly because of an amorphous mystique that wards off close examination. Traditional organizational analysis fails to completely penetrate the process. When institutions, participants, and processes are also viewed through an anthropological lens it becomes far easier to understand how participants develop meaning for their roles in search processes, how they relate to institutional culture, and how the search process may, in fact, contribute to a continued lack of diversity in executive ranks. This study, a critical ethnographic study of presidential searches at two comprehensive community colleges begins the process of deconstructing presidential searches by viewing the process through the eyes and experiences of individual participants. Through their stories we recognize the presidential search process as a ceremonial activity focused on serving varied constituencies as a means of conveying legitimacy on the final selectee. We see the process as a central activity within the culture of higher education and yet as one that has inherent flaws posing risks to candidates, participants, and potentially falling short of the stated objective of choosing the next best president for the institution. Nevertheless, as the research evolves we begin to identify ways in which the key ceremonial nature of the process can be maintained yet functional components changed in order to better protect the individuals involved and position the institutions to recruit and select the next best president.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

x

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER I

Introduction: Who will Lead?

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Introduction: Who Will Lead?

Who will lead America's community colleges over the next five, ten and twenty years? Under the best of circumstances this would be an important question insofar as community colleges serve 29.4% of the undergraduate students in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). However, in an era of increased pressure on state funding for higher education, rapidly changing needs for professional and workforce training, and the challenge of underprepared students in an open admission environment the questions of who will become the next generation of community college presidents and how they are chosen take on even greater significance. The purpose of this research is to study the process currently used by a significant percentage of colleges and universities to select new presidents (Birnbaum, 1988a, p. 490). But, as will become apparent throughout a discussion about presidential search processes, there is a significant social equity issue that emerges when studying the search process used to select college and university presidents and the process by which they are chosen. Access, diversity, and freedom of thought and expression are values commonly associated with institutions of higher education yet when we stand in the door of college executive offices we rarely find women or persons of color prepared to greet us. In fact, almost 375 years after the founding of Harvard University, over 150 years after the first land grant college was established, and at a time when there are over 4,000 institutions of higher education in the United States we find college executive ranks singularly dominated by white males (*The*

American College President, p. 84). The reality of this social inequity is a major issue for

research and was a factor that affected the choice of research methodology for the study.

This study is a qualitative research project using a critical ethnographic

methodology to develop meaningful understanding of how participants in the search

process make sense of their responsibility, relate to each other in the process, bring their

values and priorities to committee table, negotiate agreement on search priorities and

process, and in the final analysis identify the determining factor that guide the final

selection of a candidate.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES: ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY MEET UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS

Community colleges in the United States are being confronted by a series of

challenges and changes in their operating environments that will be at the center of

leadership agendas for the next decade. Within the past three years over 20 states are

facing budget deficits that are forcing significant reductions in funding for higher

education (Selingo, 2008; Mangan, 2008; Keller, 2010). Nationally the number of first

time students requiring remedial courses is on the rise. In 1995 it was estimated that 41%

of students entering public community colleges required remedial coursework and that

figure has risen since the report was first published (Saxon and Boylan, 2001).   In the

State of New Mexico, for example, one out of every two high school graduates who

attend a state university or community college test are underprepared in one or more

subjects (State of New Mexico, 2008). In the 1980's Cross (1981) suggested, "The old

ideals that sparked enthusiasm and the sense of common purpose in community colleges

have receded, and new ideals have not yet emerged to take their place" (p. 114). Cross and Fiedler (1989) noted that the major priorities of community college education in the 1960's and 1970's were counseling and advising and that these priorities shifted in the 1980's from issues of access to issues of quality (p. 213). Accountability in the form of assessment of student learning outcomes is becoming the watchword of state education policies throughout the United States. Focus on assessment of learning outcomes has even found its way into the accreditation practices of the major accrediting bodies such as the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association which adopted assessment as an accreditation criterion in the 1990's. Amidst this shifting landscape of priorities and values, Cross (1981) was one of the first researchers who argued that issues of leadership remained unaddressed when she said, "While faculty, students, administrators, and trustees are firmly convinced of the critical importance of trust, open communication, and commitment, most do not find it on their campuses" (p. 119). At the same time, the percentage of diverse presidents has not kept up with the shifting demographic profile of students. As will be detailed later in this writing, although the student profile has moved closer to that of the overall population, the ethnic and gender make-up of college presidents lags far behind with white males still dominating the corner offices.

The collective impact of these and other issues creates rising pressure for change in community college operations and performance and often is in direct conflict with the natural tendency of educational institutions to resist change, much less change that is rapid and that requires dramatic realignment of priorities and resources. This clash of

new needs and demands versus old structures and systems only serves to emphasize the

need for strong, articulate executive leadership capable of bringing disparate, occasionally

dysfunctional campus stakeholders together. Community college presidents, current and

future, are facing challenges unknown, if not unimaginable to their predecessors.

WHO ARE THE CURRENT PRESIDENTS?

In light of these issues, the questions of who will be chosen to join the ranks of

community college presidents and how those individuals are to be selected increase in

significance. In 2001 research suggested that fully 75% of current community college

presidents report that they are within ten years of retirement (Shults, 2001, p. 3-5). If the

history of presidential selection is any indication of the future the "new" community

college president will be a white male, will be 60 years old, will have an earned doctorate

– most likely in education – , be serving in their first presidency and will have prior

service as a faculty member – most often as chief academic officer. Considering the

diverse nature of participants in higher education in terms of faculty, students, and

administration, the profile of college presidents in 2006 reveals an unusually

homogeneous population in terms of demographics and professional experience.

Although some progress has been made in the diversification of the individuals serving as

presidents since 1986 when 91.9% of college presidents were white the fact remains that

the preponderance of college presidencies remain in the hands of white males (*The

American College President*, 2007).

Table 1

Demographic Profile of U.S. College Presidents in 2006

% of Presidents	Demographic
77.0%	Male
85.4%	White
85.2%	Between the ages of 50-70 (the average age is 60)
83.2%	Married
75.0%	Hold an earned doctorate (43% in the field of education)
72.4%	Serving their first presidency
43.8%	Served as Chief Academic Officer
68.9%	Served time as faculty

Source: *The American College President*, 2007

WHO ARE THE FUTURE PRESIDENTS: THE WHITE PIPELINE

Two separate studies (Moore, Twombly, and Martorana, 1985; Amey, VanDerLinden, and Brown, 2001) have identified six college executive positions as the "leadership pipeline" for community college presidencies: Chief Academic Officer, Chief Business Officer, Chief Student Affairs Officer, Continuing Education Officer, Business-Industry Liaison, and Occupational/Vocational Leader. Of these six, the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) is most often the position from which new presidents emerge. Who are these individuals and how do their demographics compare to those of incumbent presidents? What we find is a remarkable and disconcerting similarity between

incumbents in these positions with regards to race and ethnicity. The CAO Census

(Eckel, Cook and King, 2009) reported the following comparison (p. 47):

Table 2

Percentage Distribution of CAOs and Presidents, by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

	CAOs %	Presidents %
Men	59.9%	77.0%
Women	40.1%	23.0%
White	85.4%	86.4%
African-American	6.1%	5.9%
Hispanic	4.1%	4.6%
Asian-American	2.4%	.9%
American Indian-Other	2.1%	2.2%

In 1984 the average age of academic officers was under 50 (Shults, p. 4). By 2000

it was projected that the average age of Chief Academic Officers would be 54+ (Moore,

Twombly, and Martorana, 1985; Amey, VanDerLinden, and Brown, 2001). In fact, by

2007 the average age of CAOs had reached 56.8 and the median age was 58 (Eckel, Cook

and King, p. ix-xii). The authors also reported that 85% of incumbent CAOs are white.

In their research, the authors also examined the career path characteristics of CAOs.

They found that 27% of CAOs had served as academic deans, 23% had served as campus

executives in academic affairs, 13% had served as a CAO at another institution, and 95%

had served as a member of the faculty during their career. It is interesting to note in their

findings that 77% of CAOs had served for at least 10 years as a faculty member prior to taking on the position of Chief Academic Officer, and that 52% of CAOs rose to the position within their current institution, and that their average length of tenure as CAO is 4.7 years (Eckel, Cook, and King, p. ix-xii, p. 48).

If current college presidents are predominantly white (85.4%) and their most likely successors are Chief Academic Officers who are also predominantly white (85%) then what of the faculty and academic leaders who comprise the primary (95%) recruiting ground for CAOs (Eckel, Cook, and King, p. 15)? The answer is that the demographics of this pipeline suggest we can expect more of the same. Eckel, Cook, and King reported that 84% of full-time, tenured faculty are white, 4.5% are African-American, 3.1% are Hispanic, 6.5% are Asian-American, and .4% are American Indian (p. 25). Valverde (2003) adds yet another dimension when he suggests that people of color are less successful not only because they lack faculty and administrative roles models but because even the governing boards of public institutions are dominated by white members. In 1997, Valverde reported, 82.7% of governing board members were white, 11.7% were African American, and 3.1% were Latino (p. 32). Thus, not only do whites dominate the ranks of college presidents, they form the bulk of the most likely candidates for becoming the next generation of presidents. Why is this situation the reality of higher education leadership? Why, in an era of open access, substantive student financial support, and rising ethnic minority enrollments, do we see tenured faculty positions, chief academic positions, and presidencies dominated by a single race/ethnicity?

Turner and Meyers (2000) offer four possible explanations for the pattern of ethnic minority under-representation in higher education: a chilly climate that undervalues ethnic minority presence and contributions, turnover resulting from failure to promote and retain, a thinly populated pipeline of ethnic minority graduate students, and the presence of economic market forces wherein ethnic minority faculty candidates can earn more income outside the academy (p. 77-78). Valverde (2003) offers a more pointed critique of higher education when he says, "Post secondary institutions are very effective at eliminating such change agents, the advocates for people of color and their agendas" (p. 8). Earlier I commented that the demographics of current incumbents suggest the potential of "more of the same" in terms of the race, gender and ethnicity of new presidential appointees. My observation was based solely on the statistics related to gender, race and ethnicity of incumbent candidates for promotion. Turner (2002) commented on issues of process when she cited Kanter (1977, p. 248-249) in support of her view that a majority frequently begets a majority. That is, according to Kanter, those in a majority are seen as one of the group, preferred for sponsorship by others inhabiting higher positions in the organization. Turner and Myers (2000) offered yet another view of the lack of authentic diversity in current organizational cultures when they said, "Marginalization is perpetuated if new voices are added while the priorities and core of the organization remain unchanged" (p. 220). From my perspective these are less explanations for the reality of under-representation than they are observations about the reality of white domination of higher education at all levels. It remains to be seen from my research if one part of the process, presidential search committees, contribute to the

existing homogeneity in higher education or if these committees can or do serve as

legitimate agents of change.

Observers frequently point out that ethnic minorities and women are making

strides and are increasing their representation in college executive ranks. However, the

American Council on Education in *The American College President* (2007) put these

"gains" in perspective when they reported, "The most sobering conclusion to be drawn

from the data reported here is that the demographic make-up of higher education leaders

has changed very slowly during the past 20 years. Women and members of ethnic

minority groups continue to increase their representation within the ranks of college and

university presidents, but at slow rates. Despite some shifts, the profile of the typical

college president has changed little since ACE began this series in 1986" (p. 57).

Valverde (2003) summed up the situation when he observed that although many of the

ideas and efforts related to civil rights originated on campuses that colleges and

universities have been slow to adapt and embrace the very ideas that originated within

their domain (p. 4-5). Yet, I believe there is an even more compelling question that might

well form the basis for later research beyond this study. Of the 14% of presidents who

are ethnic minorities and the 23% who are female (note: the percentages are not mutually

exclusive), are these individuals truly representative of a shift in organizational culture

that is more reflective of the changing population? To what extent do statistics fail to

reveal reality? What of the quality of inclusion of women and people of color (Turner,

2002, p. 81)? The discussion does suggest that as my research into the search committee

process moves forward I should be sensitive to the question of whether or not the

committees themselves take on the characteristics and attributes of a particular gender, race and or ethnicity. Do committees establish environments that draw out discourse and discussion or do they reinforce already existing norms? Are search committees respectful and engaging of different cultures or do the search committees themselves take on characteristics of a particular gender, race and/or ethnicity regardless of the diversity of individual members? These are most certainly issues and questions that fall within the scope of my proposed research.

Because of the average age of incumbent presidents (60) and the average age of CAOs (56.8), the most likely successors to the president's chair, higher education is faced with an impending shift in executive leadership that portends an opportunity to fundamentally shift the racial/ethnic composition of top college leadership positions throughout the United States. That is one reason it is more important than ever to develop a deep understanding of the processes by which executive leaders in higher education are chosen. Do these processes operate with structures and practices that are inherently or systematically biased against open selection? Are selection practices inherently sound and simply mismanaged? These and other questions beg to be addressed as higher education begins the process of choosing the next generation of executive leaders who will guide our colleges and universities for the next generation of students.

Common terms and phrases that are used in recruiting advertisements for presidents include visionary, comfortable working in a diverse environment, able to lead change, capable of leading the college to the next level, and able to build consensus among campus constituencies. Recruiting documents suggest a vision of the college

president as a driving force for change, as a person who others will follow, who has the ability to quell disturbances, who can raise prodigious sums of private donations, who is energetic, enthusiastic, intelligent and humorous, who is entrepreneurial, and who can move facilely between students, campus colleagues, community leaders and legislative halls. Although there initially appears to be little difference in the phrases used for recruiting of presidents for community colleges and four year institutions it will be interesting to delve more deeply into possible distinctions between recruiting documents depending on the nature of the presidency involved. Overall, if recruiting documents are a realistic guide with regards to search committee expectations and goals then the successful candidate would have to be a truly exceptional individual. Yet higher education search processes, themselves part of a longstanding institutional culture, continue to produce more of the same. Shults (2001) commented on the issue of leadership preparation when he reported, "The AACC survey asked presidents to identify aspects of the job for which they had not been prepared. The most frequent response was that they had not fully understood the overwhelming nature of the job" (p. 8). In an era of unprecedented challenge, calls for visionary leadership, and institutional change it is difficult to accept that only white men who have reached the age of 60, hold doctorates, and have education as their primary professional experience are consistently the best choices to lead America's universities and colleges. On its' face, this reality – virtually all-white, male dominated presidencies – is disturbing and raises many social and ethical issues with regards to the openness and fairness of the traditional selection process.

Hopefully, meaningful research into the selection process will make it possible to identify

some of the issues and process dynamics that contribute to this homogeneous condition.

THE ACADEMIC SEARCH: RITUALISTIC SYMBOL OR EFFECTIVE

PROCESS

The question posed at the beginning of this section was, "Who will lead

America's community colleges over the next five, ten, and twenty years?" To explore this

question it is first necessary to address the questions of, "what is the process by which

these leaders will be identified and selected and what values and assumptions underlie

this process," and "who will be the people guiding these processes and what underlying

values, assumptions, and beliefs do they bring to the search process?" The issues are not

simply organizational in nature and certainly cannot be identified only through

organizational analysis. It is important to recognize that these processes are, in fact,

activities composed of individuals each of whom brings personal experience, values,

priorities, pre-existing relationships, and objectives to the search activity. The search is

not as much a series of steps as it is a dynamic interaction of a group of people who have,

for the most part, not worked together prior to the search and who, after the search, will

retreat to their prior positions. At a time when the number of community college

presidents leaving office is rising and the need for effective leadership is greater than

ever, the tradition-rich process of selecting college and university leaders seems uniquely

out of step with the modern, diverse world of higher education. Stakeholders in the

selection process speak of openness, legitimacy, and of making the best selection of a

new leader. Yet, after decades of practice the system continues to produce a population

of presidents that is anything but representative of the education community much less the community at large. Numerous participants in the process and researchers have suggested that the academic search process has become more of a symbolic ritual than a process that effectively and consistently chooses the best candidates for executive leadership.

Birnbaum (1992) described academic search and selection processes as "elaborate" activities designed to impute legitimacy to candidate selection by allowing wide participation from varied stakeholder groups (p. 9). Hahn (1995) expanded on Birnbaum's observations by suggesting that the search activity is intricate, has many partners, is "process-laden," and has become a "symbol strewn procedure." He goes on to say, "they [searches] consist of rituals that meet our needs as communities but offer little rational analysis of what is required for leadership success – little basis for predicting it, and less for assuring it" (p. 3). Researchers have also commented on issues related to the quality of the search processes which, in turn, may affect the quality of the final selection. Kubala (1999) believes, based on his personal experiences as a candidate and his research, that many searches are conducted by ill-prepared participants. He cites participant lack of knowledge of presidential duties, lack of experience in search processes, and lack of experience or training in dealing with candidates as reasons for poor searches (p. 190). Kubala and Bailey (2001) identified poor communications, lack of welcoming environments for candidates, and outright disorganization as additional factors affecting the quality, or lack thereof, of academic searches (p. 802). Riesman (1982) believes that the academic search process is beset by challenges of compromise.

For example, he suggests that the need to compromise on candidates who present no

outward threats to faculty yet are able to make tough decisions on finances which affect

faculty is a case in point that highlights the difficulties inherent in search processes. He

says, "In some cases I have observed, compromise choice ends up satisfying no

constituency" (p. 312). Failure of the search process to be perceived as legitimate by

faculty, often conditioned on process versus actual selection outcome, frequently results

in presidencies that are at special risk for failure (Birnbaum, 1992, p. 15). Why do search

processes fail outright or, at best, often struggle to achieve their overarching goal of

selecting the best possible leader for an institution? As search processes are in reality

complex organizations of human interactions it is necessary to begin by breaking the

process into constituent parts. These researchers, and others, have commented on the

broad search process but have rarely delved into the components that make up the overall

activity or the meaning that participants make of the process. Although search processes

may vary somewhat between institutions there is one component found in virtually every

academic search: the search committee. Birnbaum (1988) noted that the current system

of using a search committee composed of not only those responsible for the selection,

usually college trustees, but of representatives of stakeholders with whom the president

works dates back to the early 1950's. Birnbaum suggests that since the 1960's the search

committee composed of "representatives of competing constituencies" has become the

norm for guiding selection of college presidents (p. 494). What better place to begin

making sense of the presidential selection process than by learning more about the human

dynamics, underlying values, assumptions, beliefs, and institutional activities that drive

the search committee process? For me, as the researcher, the broad question of "who will lead", transitions to a narrower focus on a single, critical component of the search process: the presidential search committee.

The beginning point for a study of leadership selection in higher education, specifically a study of the search committee process, is to depict the general organizational characteristics of higher education institutions and to examine the nature of college presidencies through the eyes of search committee members and participants in the search process, particularly at the community college level. With these contextual frameworks in place it was then possible to begin development of a research project that explored two existing leadership selection processes. The goal of this research has been to develop an understanding of the selection phenomena through illumination of patterns of human activities and relationships within the context of higher education organizational culture and sector values. Throughout the research I have always borne in mind the nature of the presidency; its' opportunities and its' challenges. Using a constructivist framework this qualitative study began with no specific theory and sought to develop a rich understanding of the forces at work in the selection process and if a traditional selection process is capable of consistently producing the best possible outcomes for the institution or, if the outcome is more "a matter of luck" as was suggested by a current community college president during a private conversation. Birnbaum (1988) agrees when, drawing on the work of March and March (1977, p. 377-409), he argued that the lack of variation in candidates and the difficulty in assessing candidates based on limited information frequently results in successful matching of

candidates and positions more by chance than design (p. 493). March and March (1977), when evaluating selection and performance of school superintendents, said, "Within the population of superintendents, success is almost random…" They went on, "If executives are indistinguishable but jobs are not, success will be random but movement will not be…" (p. 406).

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Organizational Characteristics of Higher Education Institutions

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Evaluation of higher education leadership search and selection processes must be placed within the context of institutional characteristics that currently exist within the educational sector. The sheer number of colleges and universities in the United States, 4,084 – 2,363 four year institutions and 1,721 two year institutions – (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), might suggest that the sector is very diverse in terms of organizational characteristics, practices and values. However, closer examination of the sector reveals a surprising homogeneity of institutions in terms of organization, purpose, and general operations. What are the institutional characteristics and structures that contribute to this similarity and what are the implications for leadership in terms of selection and expectations? When applied to the study of educational institutions two organizational concepts, loose coupling and isomorphism, offer meaningful insight regarding the institutional context within which leadership selection and performance occur in higher education.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AS LOOSELY COUPLED ORGANIZATIONS

Loose coupling, as applied to colleges and universities, describes an organization composed of various operating units and sub-units that work together yet are not

necessarily tied by formal lines of authority and accountability. This organizational

reality has special significance for the presidential search process insofar as it creates an

environment of near "city-states" each of which feels a distinct need to be a participant in

the selection process lest the process fail to represent their perceived interests. Weick

(1976) specifically singles out the education sector as an example of loosely-coupled

institutions when he said, "In the case of authority as the coupling mechanism, the

elements include positions, offices, responsibilities, opportunities, rewards, and sanctions

and it is the couplings among these elements that presumably hold the organization

together. A compelling argument can be made that neither of these coupling mechanisms

is prominent in educational organizations found in the United States" (p. 4). Weick

suggests that an example of a loosely coupled structure in education might be the

relationship between the counselor's office and the principal's office. According to

Weick, "The image is that the principal and the counselor are somehow attached, but that

each retains some identity and separateness and that their attachment may be

circumscribed, infrequent, weak in its mutual effects, unimportant, and/or slow to

respond" (p. 3). Glassman (1973) describes the degree of coupling between systems in

terms of the activity level of variables which the systems share in common (p. 84).

Colleges and universities are traditionally organized into a series of units that share many

common variables yet persist in retaining certain responsibilities and local authority that

resist top-down management. For example, one only has to look at the traditional

structure of colleges-within-colleges led by Deans who operate with significant authority

and responsibility within their sub-unit and sit at the table of the Provost or Vice

President of Instruction as equals, colleagues with agendas, unique resources – often from

separately raised funds – and an unwavering commitment to furthering the cause of their

sub-organization. Moreover, the Deans themselves are most often selected by a search

committee and not by the singular decision of the Provost or Vice President who, on the

Table of Organization, is designated as being the authority to whom the Dean reports.

Weick continues, "By loose coupling, the author intends to convey the image that coupled

events are responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some

evidence of its physical or logical separateness" (p.3). An immediately apparent

implication for leaders in a loosely coupled organization is the difficulty of directing

activities across sub-entities. Loosely coupled units are not necessarily responsive to

singular direction and certainly are not required to act in tandem in every instance. Meyer

and Rowan (1977) suggest that because educational organizations exhibit characteristics

of bureaucracies with regards to rules and appearance yet are, in reality, loosely coupled

organizations that tension exists between what people expect and reality. Thus, according

to Meyer and Rowan, a critical requirement is that the leader must possess strong political

skills (p. 343).

Loose coupling as an organizational structure has two particularly important

implications related to the operation of a leadership selection process. Weick (1976)

noted that, "While loose coupling may foster perseverance, it is not selective in what is

perpetuated. Thus archaic traditions as well as innovative improvisations may be

perpetuated" (p. 6). His argument suggests that higher education leadership selection

processes, rooted in tradition and accepted norms may well resist pressures to change and

adapt even in the face of evidence that the system is not producing the best possible

results. Weick goes on to cite Gerald Salanick (1975) who suggested that even when the

consequences of an action might be ambiguous ~~that~~ the stated intentions of the action

serve as surrogates for the consequences (p. 8). Thus, issues of process legitimacy may

serve as an acceptable measure of success for the process itself as opposed to an

evaluation of the actual end product of the process. Weick also suggests that loose

coupling between intentions and actions also has a negative impact on leaders in that

leaders are often frustrated by the fact that plans rarely turn out (p. 4). Frustration is

frequently a contributing factor in increased movement by leaders from institution to

institution. As noted by March and March (1977) free movement of leaders between

institutions has the effect of supporting the current practices and policies of organizations

within the sector.

ISOMORPHISM IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Isomorphism is a term frequently used to describe organizations that display

remarkable similarity in operating structure, institutional values and practices, and in

participants. Simply in terms of participants, consider the remarkable demographic

homogeneity of college and university presidents as evidence of the presence of

isomorphism in higher education. Conceptually, isomorphism also plays a significant

role in the presidential selection process. Similarity of institutions breeds similarity of

experience and certainly a comfort with leaders who exhibit similar traits and who use the

familiar, comfortable terminology of the sector. Isomorphism leads to choice of new

leaders who exhibit similar characteristics and certainly to a recycling of current presidents into new presidencies.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explain how isomorphism, or homogeneity, emerges in a sector by suggesting, "In the initial stages of their life cycle, organizational fields display considerable diversity in approach and form. Once a field becomes well established, however, there is an inexorable push towards homogenization." They continue, "Once disparate organizations in the same line of business are structured into an actual field (as we shall argue, by competition, the state, or the professions), powerful forces emerge that lead them to become more similar to one another" (p. 148). Hannan and Freeman (1984) posit that the nature of the organization's product – in this case the ability to produce collective outcomes over and over – requires reliable, consistent performance which leads to institutionalization of processes and culture. This condition is present in educational organizations and contributes to isomorphism of the sector (p. 154). Meyer and Rowan (1977) present similar views when they suggest that organizations in a given sector are driven to incorporate practices and procedures defined by the prevailing concepts of work (p. 340). DiMaggio and Powell go on to identify three major forces that promote increased homogeneity among organizations within a particular field. First they suggest that despite search for diversity, relatively little variation in organizational structures exist. Further, organizations and those in positions of leadership tend to pattern themselves after those in the field they perceive to be successful or more legitimate. Finally, the professionalization of participants, such as faculty and administrative leadership in higher education, is a strong force promoting similarity of

values and practices (p. 151-152). Dey, Milem, and Berger (1977) made a similar

argument when they said that the university socialization process acts as a strong force

promoting institutional isomorphism in the sector (p. 309).

Professionalization of careers and occupations within organizations is a

particularly powerful concept when seeking to understand the nature of a sector and the

nature of leadership within the sector. Hannan and Freeman (1977) reinforce this notion

of leaders as creatures of their culture when they suggest, "…organizational decision

makers learn optimal responses and adjust organizational behavior accordingly" (p. 939).

Evolution of professionalism as manifested in norms of behavior, expected qualifications,

standards of professional experience required "to move up" are important concepts

relating to development of isomorphism as described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983).

They argue, "Moreover, while various kinds of professionals within an organization may

differ from one another, they exhibit much similarity to their counterparts in other

organizations." Further, they state, "Within many organizational fields filtering occurs

through the hiring of individuals from firms with the same industry" (p. 152).   DiMaggio

and Powell refer specifically to universities when they say, "To the extent managers and

key staff are drawn from the same universities and filtered on a common set of attributes,

they will tend to view problems in a similar fashion, see the same policies, procedures

and structures as normatively sanctioned and legitimated, and approach decisions in much

the same way" (p. 153).

Professionalization within a homogeneous sector also leads to a pattern of

movement by managers and leaders. Movement of leaders within a homogeneous sector

is more fluid, from organization to organization and with less specific institutional

commitment (March and March, 1977). This free movement, in search of increased

prestige or compensation, results in a perpetuation of sector values and characteristics.

Additionally, Allan, Gordon, and Iverson (2006) identify professionalism as one of four

common characteristics sought in presidential leaders. In their study of presidential

recruitment they noted that professionalism, a desired characteristic, refers most

frequently to, "the expert status of leaders [as] conveyed through a delineation of their

credentials, traits, experience, and skills" (p. 53). In short, like begets like.

Hannan and Freeman (1977) describe the movement of organizations with

differing ancestry towards equilibrium, or homogeneity of characteristics as a

convergence of factors.   They state, "In each distinguishable environmental configuration

one finds, in equilibrium, only that organizational form optimally adapted to the demands

of the environment. Each unit experiences constraints which force it to resemble other

units with the same set of constraints" (p. 939). Their theory does much to explain why

colleges and universities tend to display a remarkable homogeneity in terms of structure,

operation and policies. They go on to outline a set of internal and external forces that

work against adaptation by an organization. Internal forces include sunk costs of

operating, constraints on information, internal politics and forces generated by the

organization's own history. External constraints include legal and fiscal barriers to entry

and exit, the extent of adaptation violates legitimacy (e.g. elimination of undergraduate

instruction in public universities) and the collective rationality of society which suggests

the effectiveness of a particular structure (p. 931-932). Hannan and Freeman very

specifically identify universities as examples of "amalgamated holding companies" wherein the organization as a whole taxes "subunits with plentiful environments to subsidize less fortunate subunits. It is common, for instance, for universities to allocate faculty positions according to some fixed master plan, under supporting the rapidly growing departments and maintaining excess faculty in others." They argue that although the operating cost of a federation structure is relatively high and the structure itself may be unwieldy that this cost is offset by the fact that sub-units of the federation will do well no matter what the state of the operating environment (p. 954-955). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) support this argument when they state, "Organizational fields that include a large professionally trained labor force will be driven primarily by status competition. Organizational prestige and resources are key elements in attracting professionals. This process encourages homogenization as organizations seek to ensure that they can provide the same benefits and services as their competitors" (p. 154).

The implication of isomorphism, or homogeneity, for the executive selection process is inescapable. The higher education search process is dominated, if not wholly managed, by professionals from within education. The process includes professionals who are themselves products of the system, steeped in the norms, and who are most comfortable with other professionals who share their values and perceptions of how an institution should be operated. The old notion of "like-begets-like" seems somehow apropos. Pfeffer (1977) argues that attraction literature suggests that people tend to like those whom they perceive to be similar to them. He applies this attraction theory to the

search process when he states, "In critical decisions, such as the selections of persons for

leadership positions, compatible styles of behavior probably will be chosen" (p. 106).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) offered a graphic, as shown in Figure 1, to suggest the

effects that isomorphism has on an organization (p. 360).

The decoupling of structural subunits

from each other and from activity

Isomorphism within an elaborated

institutional environment   Rituals of confidence and good faith

The avoidance of inspection and

effective evaluation
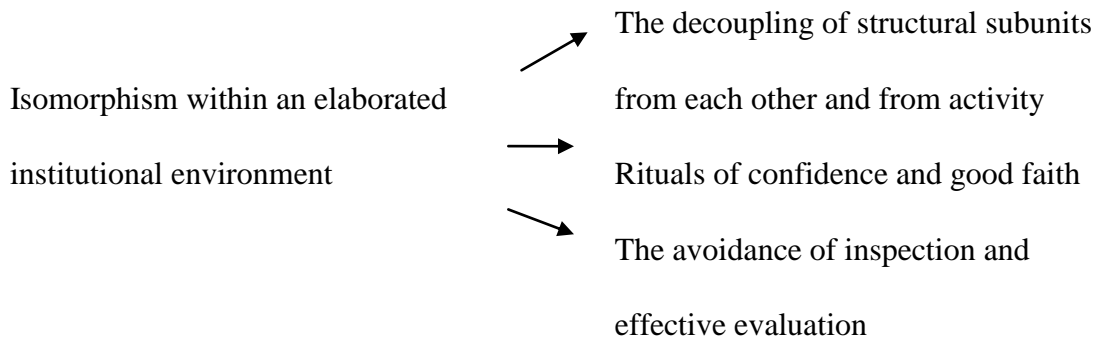
Figure 1. Elements of isomorphism in institutional environments

Their point about "rituals of confidence and good faith" suggests that isomorphic, or

homogeneous, organizations place high value on processes that are recognized as

legitimate and accepted. An obvious example would be the search committee as a

process, or ritual that establishes confidence and trust by virtue of it being a time-

honored, well understood activity. Tierny (1989) carries this point further by suggesting

that symbolic structures can actually be processes within organizations that convey

significant credibility and that may confer perceived legitimacy on process outcomes (p.

160). Pusser (2003) brought the concept of symbolism into higher education by

suggesting that there are four dimensions of decision-making in the sector: bureaucratic,

collegial, symbolic, and political (p. 123). Sporn (1996), referencing Dill, argued that due

to the character of universities they can only be managed through symbolic approaches (p.

41). In this context, an isomorphic sector that places high value on symbolic processes, is

it possible that the search committee process in higher education has taken on near

symbolic stature? If so, is the process itself crucial to the perceived legitimacy of the

outcome, the selection of a new president? Thus, in order to make sense of the

presidential selection process it follows that it is necessary to more closely examine the

symbolic process central to the majority of the searches: the academic search committee

and to explore underlying aspects of this symbolic, ritualistic process.

COLLEGES AS COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS

That college organizations tend to look similar and exhibit similar collective

behaviors does not diminish the complexity of these institutions. Pusser (2003) states

that it is difficult to explain the organizational behavior of education organizations

because these entities are complex and operate with a myriad of interests that, "do not

lend themselves to rational modeling" (p. 122). Tierny (1988) makes a similar point

when he suggests that a useable definition, or model, of the organizational culture of

higher education has remained elusive (p. 4 and 6). Sporn (1996) referencing Birnbaum

and Baldridge more specifically identifies five features that he says are common to

education organizations and that contribute to the complexity of the institutions (p. 42):

college goals are frequently ambivalent, institutions try to be "people oriented" which

causes pressure to recognize a wide variety of constituencies, colleges frequently have

problematic standards to measure goal attainment, professionals, faculty in particular,

tend to be experts in their respective fields with strong desires for autonomy and freedom,

and universities and colleges are particularly vulnerable to their environment (political

forces, economic changes, regulatory requirements, etc.).

Corson (1969) identified a set of six presumptions that guide how university affairs are conducted (p. 184-186): colleges consist of bodies of scholars, basic decisions about faculty (courses taught, hiring, discipline, promotion, etc.) are best made by a department of colleagues, college and university administration is a task for which only educators are qualified, final authority rests with the governing board which is composed of well-intentioned yet predominately ill-prepared members, to retain objectivity and preserve academic freedom, the organization must be free from artificial constraints, and students are immature and inexperienced therefore their role is to listen and learn. Although Corson's presumptions are different than the five features identified by Sporn, when the two sets are taken in combination it is possible to develop an image of the culture of higher education institutions. We begin to picture a sector populated by professionals who have a strong sense of individual identity and who have a sense that their organization is best directed by people who have similar professional backgrounds and personal characteristics. We have a sense of organizations that resist extensive authoritarian structure and formal measures of performance. Further we gain a sense of organizations that are insulated and resistant to change that is driven by external forces. All of these observations are important items to bear in mind when considering the role of presidential leaders in university affairs. Participants in the presidential search process are uniquely challenged to develop an understanding of these issues as they attempt to develop a guideline of proposed qualifications for the new president and begin the process of screening candidate credentials as they relate to the complex nature of the college organization.

The structural and political complexity of higher education institutions contribute directly to the level of difficulty encountered by college and university executives, notably presidents. Perrow (1961) talks "multiple leadership" when referring to divisions of labor related to determination of goals and assignment of power and authority to achieve them. This situation, he suggests, is most likely to exist in organizations where there are multiple goals which lack precise criteria of achievement (p. 186). Perrow's description certainly fits with Sporn's observation that colleges frequently have ambivalent goals and have problematic standards to measure goal attainment. Corson (1969) is less charitable in his description of university culture when he quotes Henry Steele Commager who said that so much is expected from universities that the institutions "reel drunkenly from task to task, from activity to happening" (p. 184).

It is into this complex organizational environment composed of institutions with loosely coupled units, ambiguous goals, independent-minded professionals, and isomorphic tendencies to resist change that colleges search for new presidents and expect them to be dynamic, inspirational leaders and work miracles of change. Corson (1969) singles out the president when he states, "The only person to make a viable institution of the university is its president. Yet the character of the university presidency makes it difficult for the president to take charge" (p. 188). Cross and Fideler (1989) suggest that the current fourth generation of community college leaders are serving as managers of ever more scarce resources, as strategic planners, and as political negotiators. Sporn (1996) argued for the importance of credible presidential leadership in an operating environment that is increasingly competitive, marked by declining public funding,

requiring increased accountability, and by ever-changing roles of the state (p. 43). How

then does, or can, traditional search processes locate and secure the best possible

candidates for presidencies? Or, does the process serve as yet one more dynamic that

perpetuates past practice by bringing candidates to the fore who themselves serve as

agents of non-change and sustained, or even increased, organizational homogeneity?

Complexity of the organizational culture in colleges and universities is a problem

not only for researchers attempting to make sense of the process by crafting models of

activity, authority, and decision-making. The complexity of organizational culture has

the capacity for creating challenges for presidential searches in higher education.

Consider that non-university members of search committees have a distinct challenge in

making sense of the culture of the university. This issue could affect their evaluation and

decision-making with regards to candidates.

Internal members of search committees often have differing views of priorities

and values, a distinct by-product of loosely coupled organizations. These varied views

and values have the potential to work against selection of strong willed, dynamic

candidates and, instead, favor compromise on candidates who are least objectionable to

the committee majority. Finally, candidates have difficulty in discerning the culture of a

particular organization thus have difficulty positioning themselves for success in the

search process. Consequently, candidates may fall back on non-threatening platitudes and

focus on personality "fit" versus presenting unique skills and experiences for

consideration.

TRIBAL CHARACTERISTICS AND THE PRESENCE OF CEREMONY IN COLLEGES

Discussion of institutional culture and how individual participants relate to the institution in higher education becomes very antiseptic and devoid of human dimension when the analysis is offered in purely organizational terms. However, when institutions, participants, and processes are viewed through an anthropological lens it becomes far easier to understand why institutional activities consistently display certain values and characteristics, how participants develop meaning for their respective roles, how participants relate to one another, and how institutional culture is created, sustained, and evolved over time. Consider the language from the *University of New Mexico College of Education Dissertation Guide for Doctoral Students* published in 2009, "…as you progress through your doctoral program, you are joining the scholarly community of our academic society" (p. 5). In my experience, participants in the higher education sector frequently view themselves as members of a unique society or sub-culture that has unique characteristics and, in some cases, special requirements for admission.

Gluckman's (2006) extensive study of tribal societies identified a number of tribal characteristics that might be used to describe activities and values found within colleges and universities. He suggests, early in his work, that the term tribal does not imply that the society is primitive or somehow less sophisticated (p. xv). Gluckman's discussion of kinship (p. 12-14), his observations concerning how tribal stability is rooted in forms of shared governance including councils and divided authority (p.144), the presence of horizontal stratification in tribes (p. 154-155), and how change in leaders results in some

social change yet the "pattern of political relations remains constant" (p. 280) all can be related to similar cultural characteristics found in institutions of higher education. Yet the comparison becomes even more pronounced with his statement concerning tribal perceptions of harmony and conflict.

> It is a canon of belief among members of the [tribal] society themselves that some such harmony is there. It is this search for harmony, despite the reality of conflict within cohesion, that anthropological investigation suggested is asserted in ritual, validated by myth (p. 283).

Manning (2000) clearly connects the culture of colleges and universities and tribal society through her discussion of rituals and ceremonies in higher education. Manning's work identified twenty-three separate rituals within higher education including, among others, honorary degree ceremonies, commencements, convocations, laurel chains, presidential inaugurations, building dedications, benedictions, and alma maters. Although her own work is silent on the issue of presidential searches, many of the concepts that she identifies have specific relation to the search process as will become apparent through the course of this study. The process of presidential search and the communications associated with the search are consistent with Manning's discussion of messages and communications within a ritual framework.

> In higher education, rituals are a rare opportunity to ponder, discuss, and debate, the role of education in human communities, responsibilities of educated people to society and weightiness of the life of the mind (p. 100).

Certainly the search process, with its broad inclusion of participants, focuses on the role

of the college in the community, discussion of the needs for specific types of leadership,

and the relationship of that leadership to the college or university culture, is an example

of the kind of ritual Manning is discussing.

Whether or not the members of a college culture view themselves as members of a

particular tribe or clan is less relevant than the reality that their actions and values exhibit

tribal characteristics. In colleges we find issues of shared governance, a gathering of

various interests when the time comes to choose a new leader, division and limit of

power, sense of self-identification as a member of a sub-culture or society of scholars,

establishment of rules by which potential members are evaluated and admitted to the

society, a sense of democratic participation and equality, and the extensive presence of

rituals and ceremonies supporting the culture and reinforcing certain values and

perceptions of legitimacy all of which is in line with Gluckman's observations about

tribal culture.

Nature of the College Presidency and Demographics of Incumbents

As is evident from the preceding discussion, college and university presidents

operate in an environment marked by competing interests, unclear or inconsistent

objectives, varied perspectives on institutional governance, and, all too frequently,

discord or conflict with a critical organization stakeholder: faculty. A study of the

presidential search process must begin not only with a discussion of the organizational

environment found in higher education, the context, but with a discussion of how this

organizational context affects the individuals who serve as campus leaders.

The initial impression created when an observer looks at the ethnic composition of college presidencies is at once alarming and yet somewhat misleading. Most certainly, community college presidential offices are overwhelmingly occupied by white incumbents (86.1%) the majority of whom are white male (71.2%) whose average age is 59.1 (*The American College President*, 2007, p. 84). But these snapshot numbers do not do justice to some of the significant changes that have taken place over the past twenty years. Information from this same source indicates that the percentage of women presidencies has increased from 7.9% in 1986 to 28.8% in 2006, over a three-fold increase. Hispanic presidencies have increased from 3.1% of the total in 1986 to 6.1% in 2006, a two-fold increase. African American presidencies, by comparison, increased by only 1% from 3.9% in 1986 to 4.9% in 2006 (p. 84). The data suggests that white male dominance, while still substantial, is shifting with significant gains being made particularly by women and Hispanics.

Despite the similarity in title, there are wide differences in the power and authority enjoyed by the president of a for-profit corporation and the president of an institution of higher education. The loosely coupled, isomorphic nature of higher education, lacking the singular profit focus of private industry, sets the stage for an environment of conflicting interests, diverse goals, and ambiguous information. McLaughlin (2004) finds that expectations for presidents in higher education are inconsistent and frequently contradictory (p. 12). Birnbaum (1986) makes a similar point about the organizational context of higher education when he observed that complex, loosely coupled organizations create a challenge for presidents who may misread or misunderstand

information they receive. Birnbaum further notes that information that exists within the loosely coupled higher education organization is frequently ambiguous (p. 382). For Hambrick and Mason (1984) the issues of organizational complexity, driven by the loose coupling found in higher education, have very specific ramifications on the nature of the presidency. According to Hambrick and Mason, leaders in complex organizations confront significant difficulties in deploying rational, technical decisions. Thus, decisions are largely the outcome of behavioral factors (p. 194-195). The implications of Hambrick and Mason's views for presidential selection are inescapable. If strategic and operational decisions have largely behavioral components then, to some extent, decisions reflect the personality, values, and idiosyncrasies of the chosen leader (p. 195). Several authors commented on their views that presidential leaders often operate in an environment where objective reality frequently takes a back seat to perception and images. McLaughlin (2004) believes that college presidents operate in symbolic realms where images and perceptions are more salient than reality (p. 7). Neumann and Bensimon (1990) suggest that college leadership is less an objective reality than it is a process that is subjectively derived (p. 680). Chaffee (1989) posits a similar view by suggesting that educational organizations are cultures within which perception, interpretation, and communication are the dominant variables in understanding reality (p. 172). In this context of shifting reality, behaviorally based decisions, and emphasis on perception it is not difficult to believe that the process of presidential search and selection is, in itself, a highly complex and subjective process.

One commonly held view of researchers looking at college leaders is that presidents operate in environments that are frequently contentious and that a central role of the president is to serve as a mediator or negotiator between conflicting stakeholders. Riesman (1982), citing Clark Kerr, simply said that the primary role of a president is to serve as a conciliator and mediator among competing and conflicting constituencies (p. 313). McLaughlin (2004) agreed when he suggested that college governance is a process of balancing the interests of multiple constituencies (p. 10). Well before McLaughlin and Riesman presented their views, Hodgkinson (1968) described governance in higher education as a process of "negotiated exchange" (p. 1). For lack of a better description it may be appropriate to suggest that the context of successful presidential leadership is management-by-negotiation. Again, this situation has clear implications for the search process in terms of the priorities for personal traits in candidates.

Another observation is that presidents operate in an environment that is inherently critical and negative. Riesman (1982) believes, based on his research, that presidents often experience frustration and feel under-appreciated (p. 317). Birnbaum (1986) observed that presidents and their actions are constantly scrutinized through a negative lens. He argued that the positive actions of presidents, as viewed by others, are frequently hard to discern yet the impact of a president who does the wrong things or makes a misstep is immediately visible (p. 394). In 1992, Birnbaum observed that a president enjoys wider support early in his or her tenure and that as length of service increase so does the scorecard of mistakes (Birnbaum, 1992, p. 2). Two researchers specifically noted that the relationship between the president and the faculty is a common source of

negative feelings (Riesman, 1982, p. 323: Birnbaum, 1992, p. 1). If we accept these

observations then a phrase to be included in position announcements might be, "Positive

attitude and ability to accept criticism required."

Yet, despite the many challenges and the fact that the president operates in an

environment of bounded power and authority there can be little doubt that the presidency

is a central, influential role on campus. Hodgkinson (1968) acknowledged that although

presidential power and prerogative have declined the fact remains that the president is

held accountable for everything (p. 1). McLaughlin (2004) agrees that presidents hold

relatively little executive power but that their leadership "by persuasion" is a powerful

force on campus (p. 10). Hambrick and Mason (1984) noted the singular influence of

powerful leaders who are able to leverage their cognitive bases of influence and personal

values into positive organizational outcomes (p. 193).

Finally, a number of researchers have attempted to meld these ideas and their own

observations into a typology of personal characteristics and professional experience found

in successful presidents. A clear, precise description of candidate characteristics and

qualities deemed necessary for a successful presidency has proven to be elusive.

Birnbaum (1992) wrote, "Not enough is known about exemplary presidents to provide

useful guidance for the preparation or selection" (p. 21). Other researchers have argued

that the search for a successful president must take into account the issue of

organizational context. That is, a highly qualified individual may be successful in one

organization yet fail in another. Past success or a model typology that fail to take into

account the organizational context are not necessarily predictors of future success

(Bensimon and Neumann, 1990, p. 684; Riesman, 1982, p. 318-332). Nevertheless,

researchers including those arguing for issues of context have suggested a number of

characteristics they believe are common to successful presidents.

Vaughan and Weisman (2003) believe that a primary requirement for presidential

success is a commitment by the leader to the mission of community colleges and a vision

of the presidency as both a personal and professional goal (p. 55). Hammons and Keller

(1990) conducted research into the competencies and personal characteristics of

successful presidencies. Their list of requisite characteristics and skills (p. 6-7) included

skills in group dynamics, visionary, committed to the community college mission, leader,

planner, delegator, skilled recruiter of personnel, high order communications skills, high

integrity, sense of responsibility, persistence, judgment when to be flexible, high energy,

and a positive attitude. Canegmi (2001) noted significant overlap in characteristics and

skills of business leaders and successful academic leaders (p. 229-232): positive

relationship between self-actualization and success, respect for members of the group,

demonstrated competence, good listening skills (able to accept negative and positive

feedback), and uses power and authority sparingly. Hahn (1995) took a more pragmatic,

operational approach to evaluation of successful presidencies (p. 9) when he suggested

that success is determined by recruiting students, meeting payroll, balancing the budget,

raising external funding, sustaining academics, and supporting faculty.

Two researchers, Neumann and Bensimon (1990), suggested a typology of

successful presidents based on the ability of the leader to adapt as context and issues shift.

Neumann (1989) believes that a key ability/role of the president is to serve as chief

strategist for the organization. Neumann identifies three primary forms of strategic

thinking – linear, adaptive, and interpretive – and goes on to suggest that a successful

leader moves between forms as appropriate (p. 140-141). Bensimon (1989) proposed an

interesting typology when she suggested that presidents operate in one of four "frames" of

reference; bureaucratic, collegial, political, and symbolic. Bensimon suggests that a

successful president exhibits the ability to move between one or more frames as

organizational issues and context shift (p. 1-2).

Clearly, college presidencies have been a central topic of research inquiry. Just as

clear, it would seem that the answer to the question of what skills and characteristics are

most important to presidential success is, "It depends." There is almost a dynamic tension

between the desire for a bold, forward thinking leader and the homogenized reality of

college organizations that are most comfortable with leaders who behave in expected

ways and who speak using terms and values that reinforce the current, homogenous,

environment. Certainly there are some agreements on characteristics and skills needed

but the eventual success of a president is dependent on an almost endless combination of

variables that include those skills and the current context of the organization. Enter the

academic search committee charged with evaluating candidates, organizational needs and

climate (context), and with balancing often conflicting goals and self-interests of

stakeholders.

Study of the Presidential Search Process in Community Colleges

The leadership selection process in higher education traditionally consists of

institutional trustees creating a broad based selection or screening committee tasked with

development of candidate screening criteria, recruitment of applicants, reviewing the

candidates, and with presenting one or more finalists for consideration and possible

appointment by the trustees (Broderick, 2008; Dowdall, 2004). Although some

organizations may employ the services of an executive search consultant, only marginal

responsibility and virtually no authority for the process exists outside the committee

structure and the legally responsible trustees. In the final analysis, the presidential search

process is most frequently managed by a collection of individuals who rarely, if ever,

work together and who have only superficial knowledge of the true duties, challenges,

and responsibility of the college presidents (Broderick, 2008; Dowdall, 2004; Kubala,

1999; Kubala and Bailey 2001). In addition, leadership selection processes are under

increasing pressure to produce the best possible outcomes yet the processes are beset by

problems including limits on best candidate applications caused by esoteric sunshine

laws, state and federal regulations requiring public disclosure of most regulatory meetings

and decisions made by public agencies, (Hearn and McLendon, 2004; McLaughlin and

Riesman, 1986), conflicting goals of process participants (Basinger, 2001), and the reality

that leadership is not an easily identifiable skill (Birnbaum, 1989). The result, all too

frequently, according to Vaughan (1998) and to the reality of the current demographic

profile of college presidents presented earlier is "no new leaders." On the surface, it

appears that academic leadership search processes are stressed by fewer applicants, more

openings, a candidate pool that is composed of individuals with similar professional and

demographic characteristics, awkward legal constraints, ill-prepared participants,

conflicting agendas, and issues of process legitimacy that may or may not be related to the

outcome of the process itself. A recent development in the presidential search process

that may well affect the nature of the process is the rise in the number of presidential

searches using the services of professional executive search firms. The American

Council on Education in *The American College President* (2007) reported between the

years 1969 – 1983 that 12.1% of presidential searches used professional search firms. By

2004 – 2006 that figure had risen to 52.4% of searches using professional support (p. 53).

Certainly, any research of the presidential search process must take into account the

active presence of these external organizations. Hodgkinson (1971) offers a colorful

description of the presidential search process when he says, "…why do we know more

about the Hopi Rain Dance than we do about how and why college presidents are

selected" (p. 4)? He suggests that early writings about college and university presidencies

are based more on opinion than "carefully collected evidence" (p. 10).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research involves a critical ethnographic study conducted in a constructivist,

emergent framework allowing for development of deep understanding of the process, the

presence of multiple voices representing the various elements of the process including

current college presidents, and in recognition of the fact that the researcher is presently

involved in creation of a leadership succession process at his own institution. Although

there is evidence to indicate that the current search process may not be resulting in a

diverse range of presidencies and that the process is under significant pressures working

against effective operation it is important that this study begin from the point of pure

examination of the process without pre-judgment on effectiveness of the process or

quality of the outcomes. This study does not begin with a specific theory or with any explicit end-game in mind other than to develop a deep understanding of the existing dynamics and underlying values and assumptions held by participants in two traditional community college search processes. I hope that by gaining a deeper understanding of these processes I will be able to inform those responsible for guiding search processes in the future. Further, I hope that the study will suggest possible directions for future research and, potentially, inform the development of theories concerning how the process might be amended to better serve the goal of selecting the best possible leader for a community college.

The objective of the research may be re-stated as seeking to develop significant understanding of the presidential search process from the perspective of the participants who give life to the process through their participation as members of the presidential search committee. The research does not begin with a specific theory or hypothesis, does not seek to develop a specific theory and is not attempting to apply findings to a broader population. Further, the research seeks to be interpretive and is aimed at developing insights into the meanings of experiences of the process participants, to deconstruct the traditional search process in order to more fully understand the forces and dynamics that have resulted in the cultural homogeneity of college presidents – at the apparent expense of candidates and potential candidates from diverse populations, to develop a rich understanding of the operation of the search committee, as seen through the eyes of the participants, within the context of the organizational culture of the research site and to develop knowledge that can be used to inform current and future search activities with a

potential goal to improve the ability of the process to identify and successfully engage

diverse candidates.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE RESEARCHER TO THE PROJECT

It is important to identify the relationship of the researcher to the topic. The

relationship of the researcher to the topic at hand, and to the study participants is critical

to understanding the lens the researcher uses to interpret the data. Additionally, if the

researcher is inside the process this positionality can affect the approach to interviewing

and the relationship between the researcher and the informants. By recognizing my

position within the study and my relationships to the participants I can begin to work

through the "messiness of understanding the influence these different positions have on

the research process" (Jones, Torres, and Arminio, 2006, p. 104-108).

Currently I am serving as director of research and planning at a rural

comprehensive community college in the southwestern United States. A key aspect of

my responsibilities is to work closely with the college's president to develop and put in

place plans for managing leadership succession when the president chooses to retire.

Thus I have a higher than might be expected level of interest in the project insofar as the

knowledge I gain will most likely inform my daily work on a project of importance to my

institution. The constructivist approach, which will be detailed in later chapters, to the

research is completely consistent with my need to comprehend and evaluate the

leadership selection process without preconceived theories about the process. The

significance of the project is increased due to my professional connection to the topic and

the site of the study. On an academic level the research has significance because of the

number of college presidencies opening annually and the question of why traditional

searches consistently yield similar results. Now, because of my relationship to the study,

the project takes on greater significance because of its near real-time ability to inform an

ongoing project to plan leadership transition at my own institution.

Certainly, I will have to guard against allowing my experience at work to

influence perceptions of what I find during research at other schools. At the same time I

will be able to use my experience and knowledge to guide me to deeper levels of inquiry.

In order to best support the goals of deep inquiry and avoiding misperceptions, the

research for the project will engage institutions and individuals outside of my own current

institution. I will not be studying the search process at my own institution for two

reasons. First, the most recent presidential search process is over 12 years old thus too

much time has passed which will affect participant recollections and perceptions of the

process. Second, study of external institutions that recently went through presidential

searches will better serve to inform the study independent of my own bias and perceptions

which may result from being involved in the search process at my own institution.

Finally, it is important to note that demographically I am a mirror of the current

college president. I am a white male, in my early 60's, am in the process of securing the

requisite academic credentials for a presidency, and am certainly a product of the

traditional academic executive search process. I hold a certain aspiration to become a

college president. Consequently, I feel a different type of dynamic tension between my

desires as a researcher to discover how it is that presidential selection processes

consistently favor one demographic and yet, as a member of that demographic, hope, if not expect, to become a newly selected president.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for this study are deliberately focused on the singular examination of recent search committee processes at two community colleges:

1. What experiences, underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs do search process participants bring to the search activity and how do participants negotiate their position and role in the process in relationship to other participants?

2. To what extent does the process of negotiating relationships and priorities by participants affect the overall search activity?

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

The main assumption underlying this study is that it will be possible to develop an effective qualitative study of leadership search processes by triangulating information from search documents, interviews with process participants and interviews with search professionals.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

On a broad level, this research is significant because it will seek to develop a deep understanding of an important higher education leadership process at a time when the presidential search process is becoming more important due to increased challenges in the sector and the decline in the number presidential aspirants. Further, the study will serve to inform the current professional activity of the researcher and add to the body of

knowledge that is needed in order to construct an effective plan of leadership succession at the researcher's home institution. Finally, as will become more apparent in the review of literature, there has been relatively little written about the academic leadership search process. This study will add significantly to the body of knowledge about this process and will, hopefully, be able to identify opportunities for future research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The major limitation of this research will be that the results of the inquiry will not be able to be generalized to a broader population. Also, the quality of the research will be directly affected by the level of candor of the interview participants and their willingness to engage in a deep exploration of motivations, personal perspectives and values. Finally, although this is not a specific limitation of the study it should be noted that the study will not evaluate any specific presidential selection. Evaluation of a specific selection might yield valuable information concerning the process and outcome; however, such a study would clearly risk moving into the area of individual privacy and run counter to the need for members of a search process to keep details of a specific search confidential.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined as indicated.

Trustees – the body of elected or appointed individuals who hold legal responsibility for setting institutional policy and for appointing the president of the college.

Search Committee – the body of individuals appointed by the Trustees who have responsibility for a defined portion of the search and selection process.

Search/Selection – the terms search and selection will be used interchangeably to

indicate the process of identifying final presidential candidates for consideration

by the Trustees.

Community College- a two year institution of higher education, generally public,

offering instruction adapted in content, level, and schedule to the needs of the

community in which it is located (Baker, 1994).

Summary

The issues and challenges confronting the next generation of college leaders,

notably community college presidents, are daunting. At the same time, the nation is

facing an increasing turnover in college presidencies driven largely by the age of the

current incumbents. Who will take up the mantle of leadership and become the next

generation of community college leaders? The importance of how these leaders are

recruited and selected cannot be overstated. There is little doubt that the most common

process that will be employed in selecting these leaders is the search committee. When

looking at the results of the search committee process questions begin to arise concerning

the efficacy of the process and whether or not the process, a long standing tradition, is

capable of identifying the best possible leaders for the next generation of presidencies.

We observe that the homogeneous nature of the education sector is reflected in the

remarkably homogeneous body of executive leaders. This striking sameness of college

and university presidents runs counter to the frequently professed value of diversity

claimed by institutions of higher education. Moreover, in a period of ever-increasing

turnover in presidential ranks it is difficult to accept that a virtually all-white, male

dominated cadre of presidents represents the "best-of-the-best" in terms of potential leaders.

The goal of this study is to closely examine the traditional leadership selection process, the academic search committee, in order to develop a deep understanding of the issues and forces at work in this process. Although the study is prompted by the appearance of issues in the search process, the study itself does not begin with any specific theory or hypothesis. This chapter has presented the general organizational context of higher education within which leaders must operate. In addition, the chapter has outlined the nature of the problem; is the traditional academic search process robust enough to meet the demands of choosing the next generation of college presidents? This chapter has identified the conceptual framework for the study, the relationship of the researcher to the study, defined key terms, outlined the key assumptions and offered an explanation of the limits of the study. The next chapter will move on to a review of the literature related to college presidencies, academic search processes and issues of leadership succession in complex organizations.

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CHAPTER II

Review of Literature: Peering into the Black Box

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Review of Literature: Peering into the Black Box

Despite differing perspectives, few stakeholders in higher education organizations would dispute that the presidency is a central, if not critical, role in the successful operation of colleges and universities. In 1959, Harold Stoke wrote, "One thing is clear: colleges must have presidents and it makes a great deal of difference who they are" (p. 20). It follows then who these presidents are in terms of experience and qualifications, how they are selected, how they transition into office, and how they fit into and shape the culture of the organization are issues of significance in higher education leadership studies. The process of changing presidents, whether in a higher education organization or a private enterprise, is not a single event although it does have, for all practical purposes, a defined beginning and a visible end. As is reflected in the literature, both scholarly and practice-based, the process of changing executive leadership is composed of a series of highly inter-related activities. What is it about these activities that have contributed to the existence of a homogeneous body of presidents who are hardly representative of the diverse stakeholders whom they serve? The intent of this literature review is threefold. With this review I am seeking to identify relevant literature that discusses the various parts of the presidential selection process. In addition to broadly informing this study, my goal of this review process was to identify existing research specific to processes for final identification and selection of a successful candidate. Second, by identifying the existing research, and gaps within that research, the review helped place the current study into context within the existing body of knowledge related

to presidential selection. Finally, the review helped to guide both the structure and the

execution of the study such that the research is better able to contribute to the body of

knowledge by adding value to existing information and, perhaps, suggesting new

explanations for outcomes as well as possible strategies for future search activities.

Perhaps the most important outcome of any comprehensive examination of

literature is what a review does not find. What questions are not answered? What new

lines of inquiry beg attention? In this instance, despite the presence of significant

literature, both in quantity and quality, related to presidential search and selection the fact

remains that a key process, one that has taken on a symbolic almost ritualistic stature,

resides at the center of virtually all presidential searches and this process – the search

committee – has received relatively little examination by scholars of educational

leadership processes. The inner workings of the search committee in terms of participant

preparation, development of collective goals, and inner negotiations remain somewhat a

mystery. Friedman and Olk (1995) put it another way when they wrote, "Most previous

research has examined relationships between contextual conditions and outcomes

(particularly economic ones) surrounding CEO succession events while leaving the

succession process as kind of a black box" (p. 160).

Literature reviewed for this study originates in two arenas; scholarly research from

the academy, and peer reviewed practice-based writings. Although it might be reasonable

to suggest that the review should be limited to academic-based research such a limit

would ignore important information related to executive search and selection outcomes; a

topic of great interest in private industry. Inclusion of relevant practice-based literature

ensures that the resulting research will be broadly grounded in the full range of issues

pertinent to the presidential search process.

Emerging Themes

Although I reviewed a wide range of scholarly and practice-based writings related

to presidential search and selection, I found that the writings clustered into a relatively

small number of patterns, or themes. These themes, four in number, represent important

insights into the presidential search process. Yet, these themes, and the writings behind

them, fall short of offering the kind of insight into the search process that is needed to

understand the human dynamics of the search committees. As a means of

characterization and to distinguish between these themes I have created my own labels for

each: serving two masters, the search for fit, politics nonetheless, and nuts and

disconnected bolts.

SERVING TWO MASTERS

My review of literature leads me to believe that an issue inherent in presidential

searches is the need for the process to serve two masters, or objectives. The first

objective of the process is the obvious, always stated goal of choosing the best candidate.

The second objective is for the process itself to be perceived as legitimate, thus imparting

legitimacy to the candidate selected. As will be described later, this issue of legitimacy

sometimes over-shadows the actual selection of a candidate. The priority placed on

establishing legitimacy of the process can lead to an unrealistic focus on the process as a

symbolic ritual, taking on an importance that is disproportionate to the actual outcome.

THE SEARCH FOR FIT

Search committee advertisements and public statements speak frequently of seeking the best qualified candidate. Yet, as some researchers observe, once candidate qualifications are used as a filter to create a small pool of finalists, the ultimate selection is made on the basis of fit, or personality, as opposed to pure ranking of candidates based on experience and qualification attributes.

POLITICS NONETHELESS

Over the course of my experience in higher education I have participated in numerous search committee processes both as a committee member and as a candidate. Frequently, participants in those processes referred to the committee activities as apolitical or above politics. However, the review of literature related to the presidential search processes suggests that, despite protests to the contrary, searches are very political activities.

NUTS AND BOLTS DISCONNECTED

Various researchers commented on specific aspects of search processes and singled out problems with several of the traditional practices associated with searches. Four specific issues were identified by multiple authors. Specifically, authors noted problems with sunshine regulations requiring open search processes, issues with the efficacy of interviews as the primary method of collecting information, the challenge of single-issue committee members, and an overall lack of training and relevant experience of search committee members.

Review of Literature

When reviewing literature concerning presidential/executive search and selection processes in higher education one outcome quickly becomes apparent. While there is a reasonable amount of scholarly and practice-based literature concerning executive-candidate qualifications and that discusses various aspects of the selection process (e.g., interview techniques, or qualifications of those making the selection) few, if any, articles speak clearly to the nature and activities of the most common search process in higher education; the academic search committee. A notable exception to this dearth of writing focusing on the search committee process is an article by Robert Birnbaum published in *The Journal of Higher Education* in 1988. Of the literature reviewed for this research, Birnbaum's article offered the most comprehensive view of the search committee structure and process. Yet, he fell short of offering a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the process that is central to selection of executive leaders in higher education. I will incorporate Birnbaum's 1988 writing throughout the course of this critical review and then return to this specific article at the close.

From the start, the search and selection process in higher education is challenged by issues caused by unanticipated conflict between multiple objectives which may require behaviors or processes that work on contravention to each other. A good example of this situation involves the obvious, seemingly non-controversial, objectives of identifying the best possible candidate and at the same time conducting a process that is viewed as legitimate by all stakeholder groups. It is understandable that legitimacy of the search

process is important insofar as the vast majority of stakeholders who have strong self-

interest in who becomes the next president will have no direct personal engagement in the

process other than as observers. In some cases stakeholders are frequently more

concerned with legitimacy of the process than with the actual results of the process

(Friedman and Olk, 1995, p. 157). Searches in higher education exhibit a number of

differences from leadership transitions in a for-profit corporate environment. In higher

education, the focus is on perceived fairness and legitimacy of the process which is

measured, in part, by the level of agreement among stakeholders on the committee (p.

156). This pressure for unanimity is a force which may well push towards the

homogenization of candidates and away from controversy.

Issues of search legitimacy are reflected in that significant portions of the

academic search process are highly ritualistic, thus creating a higher level of trust and

confidence in a form that is familiar to a broad spectrum, of stakeholders (Birnbaum,

1988). I find it important to note that Birnbaum suggested that an unintended

consequence of this focus on ritual or form may be to preclude asking important,

controversial questions that may, in fact, serve to distinguish between candidates.

Traditional academic norms of courtesy and civil discourse work against asking difficult

questions and engaging in pointed, potentially contentious debate (p. 491-492). In 1992

Birnbaum wrote that presidents whose selection process is seen as illegitimate are at

special risk for a failed presidency (p. 15). Search processes have been described as

rituals that meet our needs as communities but offer little rational analysis for leadership

success (Hahn, 1995, p. 3). Thus we begin to distinguish potentially conflicting

objectives in the processes wherein the search for the best candidate is inhibited by

pressures for conformity of opinions, reluctance to engage in difficult discourse and

asking of controversial questions that might differentiate between candidates, and

emphasis on ritualistic form that meets the test of external legitimacy yet lacks a

robustness that may be necessary to identify the truly best candidates. Perhaps not truly

two masters but these potentially conflicting objectives create an environment that has the

potential to work against the ability of the search to find the best candidate.

With regards to the political nature of the search process, Zald (1965) suggested

that the structure of the process is designed to promote the notion that the process is

apolitical, itself a measure of legitimacy. He argues that despite the attempt to create a

process that appears to be apolitical the reality is that the ultimate act of choice results

from the prevailing power (political) balance of the organization (p. 53). Zald went on to

label the entire selection process as a political activity insofar as the process involves

components of power, engages mechanisms of elections and voting, and involves basic

choices of organizational goals (p. 59). A different perspective may be that the symbolic

search process is a means by which the nominally responsible group, the college trustees,

deflects responsibility for any potential shortcoming or failure in the search/selection

from themselves (Riesman, 1982, p. 327). Most certainly, avoidance of responsibility or

deflecting responsibility to another is a highly political act.

Several authors commented on the presence of multiple constituencies with a

resulting emphasis on process and consensus. The pressure for consensus is a driving

force in the presence of political negotiation among members of the process (Bourgeois,

1980; Janis, 1973). Janis specifically noted that the concurrence-seeking tendency of groups frequently fosters over-optimism, a lack of vigilance, and sloganistic thinking. Further, Janis suggested that members consider loyalty to the group important. This loyalty has the potential to deflect raising critical issues that may alienate group members (p. 20-21). Similar to the descriptions of searches as ritualistic, the process has been compared to an intricate dance that has many partners, is process laden, and is symbol-strewn (Hahn, 1995). Birnbaum (1988) weighed in on the issue of consensus-seeking when he said that search committees often select compromise candidates. Such a selection, he stated, may well reflect the political realities of organizational governance (p. 502). The political theme is common among authors who speak of the difficulty of achieving compromise or consensus among diverse stakeholders who are participating in the search process. Friedman and Olk (1995) said, "…successions become contests among clusters of stakeholders for organizational control" (p. 143). We can see the potential for political conflict inherent in a ritual process that requires the active presence of diverse stakeholders yet places an emphasis on consensus and unanimity. McLaughlin and Riesman (1986) offered their perspective of the political reality of searches when they observed that, in the pursuit of legitimacy, large committee size attempts to include as many constituencies as possible yet the result is that size tends to dilute the sense of individual responsibility (p. 473). Writing in 1985, McLaughlin and Riesman described the search committee in biblical terms.

> Search committees, as a result, often have an almost Noah's Ark-like
>
> composition: if there is a male trustee, then there is a female trustee, with faculty,

students, staff, and community representatives also apportioned equally by gender.

It is as if a search committee is seen, not as an efficacious device for finding a

president for the College, but rather as a symbol of the College's egalitarian high-

mindedness (p. 343).

Thus we come to the reality that even as idealists tout the ritual, symbolic search process

as being somehow above traditional politics of human interaction we see that it is,

nonetheless, a highly political process.

The issue of fit, how a particular candidate's personality, demeanor, stated values,

and behavior are perceived to be in sync with the organization and individuals within the

search process, is a topic that has received considerable attention. It is within these

discussions and writings that I find some of the more important concepts and insights that

helped me frame my study and the specific questions I used when interviewing

participants in the search process. Examination of the concept of candidate fit starts to

shine light into the black box of the search process.

Fiedler (1996) suggested that a focus on fit, or personality, is not bad but that it

cannot be the single lens through which a candidate is evaluated. Fiedler believes that the

effectiveness of a leader depends in large part on her or his ability to get a group of

followers to accomplish an assigned mission. This effectiveness, according to Fiedler,

depends not only on abilities and attributes but also on how personality and behavior

match the situation (p. 242). Birnbaum (1992) made a similar evaluation when he

suggested that sometimes presidential success depends more on personality and the match

between the person and the institution (p. 22). From my perspective it certainly is

reasonable to suggest that the search for the best candidate should take into account not only experience and skills of the candidate but personality and fit within the organization as well. However, as can be seen in some of the prevailing research there is a risk associated with excessive focus on issues of fit. In fact, emphasis on candidate fit may be a contributing factor to the homogenization of candidates and passing-by of strong candidates with diverse backgrounds who might be controversial to some segments of the committee and organization as a whole.

During the mid-1960's in only a few cases did decision boards confront the real issue of matching candidate skills and abilities with particular institutional needs (Bolman, 1965b). Bolman suggested that boards frequently developed an unrealistic view of the perfect candidate and, lacking such a candidate, moved to the best fit (p. 202). The deliberation process is further affected by pressure for committee unanimity that pushes decision issues away from skills and attributes and places undue focus on personality, or fit of candidates (Riesman, 1982; McLaughlin, 2004). This avoidance of conflict in search of compromise leaves no one in the process fully satisfied with the results (Riesman, 1982). McLaughlin suggested that the process of compromise, with a resulting emphasis on fit, begins early in the process when committees write the preliminary job announcement/description. Typically all ideas and suggestions concerning candidate qualifications are included with very little filtering. Creation of this all inclusive list virtually guarantees that no single candidate will stand above all others thus the final selection is based more on fit than robust filtering of candidates (McLaughlin, 2004).

There is an even subtler, perhaps more insidious, issue involved when committees take fit into consideration. Keenan (1977) wrote, "…in a majority of interviewers studied, there was a positive relationship between his degree of personal liking for a candidate and his evaluation [of the candidate]" (p. 281). Keenan is suggesting that in many cases personality may, in reality, trump skills and attributes as determinants of choice. Keenan suggested that this relationship is even stronger when the interviewer expects to work with the chosen candidate. So who then do interviewers relate to most often? Pfeffer (1977) writes that attraction literature suggests a tendency for people to like those they perceive as similar to themselves. Pfeffer goes on to suggest that in selection of a leader those responsible will seek compatible styles of behavior and, potentially, appearance (p. 106). In this context the question of fit is not one of a final measure but of up-front criteria that may well be one of the more potent forces promoting homogenization of candidates and final selections. Instead of asking if we are looking for candidates who fit well with the institution the question might be better stated, "Are we looking for candidates who mirror our own appearance, values, and behaviors?" As I found later in my research, this issue does, in fact, affect the candidacy of some diverse candidates who choose to adapt their own appearance and manner to be more mindful of the expectations of the committee if they hope to succeed in the selection.

In addition to the three themes already identified, there are a number of operational issues that emerge when researchers discuss the search process. The nature of these issues is different than in the prior themes insofar as they derive from operating norms or external rules rather than from the complex interaction of committee members.

Foremost among these issues are the varying levels of openness, or public

information, that exists in search processes. The issue of openness in searches is very

complex in that it involves legitimacy of the process in the eyes of external observers, the

very real need for protecting losing candidates from serious discomfort in their home

organizations, and external legal requirements dictating rules for open process (Dowdall,

1999; Hearn and McLendon, 2004; McLaughlin and Riesman, 1985). At the same time

transparency, or visibility of the process to outside observers, is frequently held up as a

key measure of the legitimacy of academic search processes. Friedman and Olk (1995)

observe that secrecy of process is disruptive and de-legitimizes not only the process but

the outcome in the eyes of the observers (p. 146). Hearn and McLendon (2004) state,

"Openness is widely and deeply valued in public higher education" (p. 3). They suggest

that although openness sometimes makes participants in the process uncomfortable there

is widespread support for the idea that openness is essential for ensuring trust among

stakeholders. At the same time, several researchers suggest that an open search process

works against some candidates who may perceive that public disclosure of their

candidacy may harm them with their current employer if they are unsuccessful and have

to remain in their current position (McLaughlin and Riesman, 1986; Friedman and Olk,

1995; Hearn and McLendon, 2004). Riesman (1982) wrote that confidentiality of the

search process is always a controversial topic and that an entirely open process frequently

deters strong applicants (p. 324). He states that a modified open process has become

common practice (p. 525). Basinger (2001) went further by suggesting that there is an

inverse relationship between the level of openness in the process and the experience level of the candidates (p. 6).

McLaughlin and Riesman (1986), writing specifically on the topic of sunshine laws which create legal frameworks requiring public reporting of activities by publicly funded agencies, suggest that requirements for early disclosure of candidate names actually acts as a deterrent to potential applicants who do not want to appear to be shopping for a new position (p. 474-476). Interestingly, openness also works against potential internal candidates who often can ill-afford to be labeled as losers in the search process and have to return to work not only among colleagues but with or for a new president who may view the losing internal candidate as a threat. McLaughlin and Riesman agree and point out, "In every search, internal candidates are in an awkward position, in that they must attempt to conduct business as usual at the same time as they are being evaluated by their peers for the presidency of their institution" (p. 489). They go on to suggest that an unintended consequence of sunshine laws may well be an excessive focus on procedure and "distraction of attention" from the substance of the activity (p. 474). As noted earlier, the pressure for compromise and uniformity can lead to reluctance on the part of committee members to ask difficult or potentially controversial questions (Riesman, 1982). High levels of openness in the process may also serve to blunt or stifle important discourse. McLaughlin and Riesman observed that committee members are frequently reluctant to openly discuss candidate strengths and weaknesses when their individual remarks may become part of public record. They go on to suggest that a goal of open process is to uncover and inhibit cronyism yet a reality of

such openness is that it gives excessive weight to single negative remarks that go unchallenged. Based on these observations it is obvious to me that any study of search committee activity must explore issues of openness and possible reluctance of participants to engage in potentially divisive discourse.

Clearly, the objectives of openness and transparency, perceived as key to establishing and supporting legitimacy of the process in the eyes of stakeholders, can conflict with the objectives of developing a roster of the strongest candidates. Thus, an open process that is, in itself, trustworthy becomes central to stakeholder acceptance of the new leader. McLendon and Hearn (2006) reporting on the results of fieldwork examining issues of openness, particularly in presidential searches reported, "Openness is a widely and deeply shared value in public higher education" (p. 659). They went on,

> While there is a broad consensus that presidents should be selected with
> substantial input from the public, respondents expressed deep concern about the
> drawbacks associated with conducting presidential searches in the public eye (p.
> 669).

McLendon and Hearn talked of the "weaponization" of sunshine laws in cases when the rules are used by "cranks, "gadflies," and the "disaffected" to cause specific harm to an individual candidate (p. 664). As noted by several researchers, legitimacy of the search process involves more than transparency. Friedman and Olk (1995) suggest three additional characteristics that contribute to perceived legitimacy of the search process: length of the process, longer is better; published selection criteria, stated goals are often

more important than the final outcome; and, perceived fit of the final candidate with the organization, more an issue of personality and likeability than qualifications (p. 158).

Another operational issue involves the training and preparation, or lack of, that search committee members receive prior to beginning their work. Kubala (1999) wrote that too many searches are conducted by people who have little or no understanding of presidential duties (p. 190). Kubala and Bailey (2001) went further when they argued that not only do process participants lack requisite knowledge of presidential duties they also lack skills required to organize a search process that serves the candidates. They said, "When the two groups of presidents were compared based on their experiences with presidential search processes, it must be concluded that community colleges have a long way to go in order to improve their efficiency, effectiveness, and professionalism. Many presidential candidates were made to feel unwelcome. Communication prior to, and during, the search process was rated as poor by many. Disorganization was mentioned frequently" (p. 802). These operational issues, openness and participant preparation, suggest a line of questioning related to the employment of professional search consultants. Why do more searches employ consultants? Are these consultants able to guide committee members through complex issues of openness and are they able to address issues of participant preparation?

Efficacy of interview techniques is a subject addressed by numerous authors both within higher education and private industry (Ulrich and Trumbo, 1965; Latham and Saari, 1980; Schmitt, 1976; Arvey and Campion, 1982; Adams and Elacqua, 1999, and; Campion, Pursell and Brown, 1988). Although search committees use a variety of tools

for gathering information including documents and third party references, the candidate

interview remains a central activity in evaluation of applicants. Within this process of

interviewing candidates I see many of the previously identified issues emerge yet again.

For example, the question of fit or personality is intensified in the interview process.

Ulrich and Trumbo (1965) suggested that interviews most often push towards personality

and away from hard evaluation (p. 100). Schmitt (1976) agreed when he suggested that

early impressions play a dominant role in interviews and that interviewers reach decisions

quickly (p. 82). Adams and Elacqua (1999) were more explicit when they described a

typical interview for a faculty position, "A search committee composed of several faculty

members with a major stake in the position will first evaluate the applicants' vitae and

cover letters to determine which applicants' skills, experience, and interests are

compatible with the requirements of the position. They then develop a 'short list,' and

the top candidates on the short list are invited for an interview. The primary purpose of

the interview process is not to assess skills and abilities – most of this has been done by

reviewing vitae – but to find out whether the candidates' values and personalities fit with

the culture of the work group and department" (p. 3). I can see from these discussions

that the very process of interviewing candidates is, in itself, a force pushing towards

personality and fit decisions while away from controversy and diversity.

The effectiveness of employment interviews has been questioned for over 100

years (Adams and Elacqua, p. 1; Campion, Pursell, and Brown, p. 25). Within the

context of methods commonly used by higher education search committees, even when

the same questions are used for candidates, interviewers frequently disagree on the value

of the response (Latham and Saari, 1980, p. 422). They note that a major issue is that

interviewers are not personally familiar with a job therefore they lack capability to

effectively evaluate responses (p. 423). This issue raises, again, the question of

participant preparation, experience and training. Arvey and Campion (1982) expanded on

this issue when they noted from their research that non-verbal behavior accounted for

more than 80% of the rating variance between interviewers and not issues of ability and

performance as would be preferred (p. 305). Issues of interview effectiveness suggest

lines of questioning for my study such as how interviews were conducted, nature of the

questions, and personal and professional experience of interviewers. Operational issues,

the nuts and bolts of the process, are obviously important factors to take into account

when studying the activity of a search committee.

With the exception of Birnbaum (1988) no single author wrote comprehensively

about the presidential search process in higher education. This dearth of writing and

research points to a gap in knowledge that my own study of search committee process can

begin to address. At this juncture it is worthwhile to review the key points of Birnbaum's

1988 article *Presidential Searches and the Discovery of Organizational Goals*. His

article pulls together virtually all of the key issues identified by other authors yet falls

short, as do the others, from looking critically into the human dynamics of search

committees. When introducing his discussion of search committees, Birnbaum notes that

the committee process is relatively new only gaining wide use beginning in the early

1950's. Prior to the 1950's, according to Birnbaum, the most common selection process

involved the trustees conducting the process and making the final selection (p. 494).

Birnbaum cites Kaufman (1974, p. 28) when he reports that search committees have

become the norm with broad representation from all institutional constituencies.

Birnbaum's article identified numerous issues and themes that we have found in the

writings of other authors. The most significant difference is that Birnbaum pulls together

all these issues into a comprehensive article thus offering a more complete picture of the

search committee process. His key points include:

- The importance of process legitimacy (p. 506).

- The goal of the search is to find the best candidate yet in the final analysis

  the choice may depend more on personality than a measure of the

  candidate's attributes (p. 497).

- The process can be so haphazard as to resemble chance (p. 493).

- Candidates come from similar backgrounds and tend to look like each

  other (p. 492).

- Searches frequently operate with imperfect information on both sides thus

  resulting in poor decisions by candidates and committees alike (p. 492).

- Committees operate with broad representation from occasionally

  competing constituencies (p. 494).

- A good deal of the search process is ritualistic which may be more

  important to all participants than the actual outcome (p. 492).

However, throughout his writing Birnbaum speaks of committees composed of

representative constituencies yet he fails to delve into the nature of the human interactions

which take place within the committee structure. I find it even more significant that

Birnbaum and all authors reviewed failed to raise issues related to candidates of color or

female candidates. To the extent that candidates are discussed it is most often in the

abstract or related to specific experience or professional attributes. It seems clear to me

that activities and interactions inside the search committee, the "black box" to use

Friedman and Olk's (1995) phrase, is the best, first place to begin understanding the

process and culture that has consistently kept higher education leadership within a

singularly white, male domain.

Summary

As I work through this review of relevant literature I find myself wondering if the

nature of the search process, a highly symbolic activity, is less a robust screening

selection method than it is, itself, a homogenizing process filtering out those who are

controversial or who do not match the existing ethnic and gender characteristics of higher

education leadership? My review of the prevailing literature has served to reinforce my

belief that there is a definite need for research into the inner workings of presidential

search committees. At the same time, this review has informed numerous lines of inquiry

that I wish to explore in my study. I believe it is reasonable to suggest that the distinct

lack of writing and discussion concerning the ethnic, racial, and gender homogeneity of

current college presidents only serves to reinforce my commitment to conducting the

study within a critical ethnographic framework. Despite the challenges, which I discuss

in the next chapter, a critical ethnography offers the best opportunity to probe deeply into

the human engagements that exist within presidential search committees. Manning

(2000) spoke of the study of meaning-making human activity when she said, "A

foundational concern in interpretive anthropology is current, as opposed to historical,

meaning as interpreted by culture participants" (p. 3).   Critical ethnography offers the

means to explore the current meaning and interpretations created by search participants

such that we can begin to develop an understanding of how and why certain types of

candidates prevail and diverse candidates are frequently left out of the executive offices.

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CHAPTER III

The Presidential Search Process: The Study

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The objective of this research is to develop a deeper understanding of how community college presidents are selected by making sense of the search committee process as viewed through the eyes and values of the participants, external observers, and placed in the context of the organizational characteristics of the education sector and the organizational culture of the research site. Although the presidential search committee is a common phenomenon in higher education, each committee is unique because its' operation is conducted by a set of individuals who frequently had little contact prior to serving on the committee, who are operating with loose guidelines, and who lack a deep understanding of the nature and requirements of the college presidency because rarely is an experienced college president or prior president a member of the committee. Deep knowledge of the process cannot be developed solely through examination of publicly stated objectives and through exploration of the dynamics of interaction between members of the central search committee. The operation of the search committee, made more complex by the almost endless combination of human interactions, is not a process prone to patterns nor easily examined using broad survey techniques.

Given that the search committee is fundamentally driven by human interaction, the beginning point for developing a research plan is to focus on questions who and what. That is, who are the participants and what are their experiences, values, assumptions, and perceptions of the process? Earlier, in Chapter I, two broad research questions were identified: What experiences, underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs do search

process participants bring to the search activity and how do participants negotiate their position and role in the process in relationship to other participants, and to what extent does the process of negotiating relationships and priorities by participants affect the overall search activity?

These broad questions can be expanded through development of related sub-questions. With regards to the human dynamics of search committees, who are the members of the search committee process, what are the professional and personal priorities of the search committee members, what is the committee structure and what are the operating norms of the group, do individual members have unstated goals or expectations for how the committee will operate or what the outcome should be? If so, what are these unstated assumptions? Further, what professional training or formal orientation to committee operations do the members receive and what pre-existing relationships do members of the committee bring to the process, if any? With regards to the organizational processes and customs of the search committee, what are the stated goals of the committee, do participants perceive that the process is well suited to achieving the stated goals, and considering the various perspectives of committee members, external participants and external observers, what factors are keys to establishing the legitimacy of the process and outcome? Also, on an individual basis, what are the characteristics and behaviors perceived to be most desired in a president by members of the committee and do committee members view the announcement documents as a true and valid representation of their perspective or more a compromise document that represents a composite perspective?

Mode of Inquiry: Qualitative

The most appropriate and effective mode of inquiry for this study is to utilize qualitative research techniques. Answers to the questions posed in this study require an understanding of how participants in search processes develop personal meaning for their roles, how they negotiate their values, assumptions, and beliefs in order to develop a common ground with other participants, and how they develop an understanding of the process and its' role in the culture of the organization. Quantitative methods would not be able to reveal the depth of knowledge and understanding that will be essential to developing meaningful comprehension of the presidential search process (Vogt, 2007). Limitations of quantitative research to develop and explain how research participants understand and make meaning of activities is highlighted in the study conducted by Chambers (2010). In this study he described both the strengths and limits of quantitative research into student experiences in postsecondary education. Chambers described how open-ended responses, or interview questions can "clarify, contextualize, and/or expand" on the quantitative information collected. Chamber's study utilized an adaptation of constructivist inquiry with the goal of producing depth and richness of understanding about a particular topic and experience that would not be available through quantitative inquiry.

Key characteristics of qualitative research including my role as the key instrument of data collection, data collection as words, focus on participants perspectives, and analysis of data inductively all point to qualitative methodology as the most appropriate mode of inquiry (Cresswell, 1998; Schram, 2006). Writing on the concept of goodness in

qualitative research, Arminio and Hultgren (2002) described six elements of an interpretive or naturalistic study through which goodness is shown: foundation, specific grounding of the study's logic and criteria, representation of voice, the art of meaning making, and implications for professional practice. These elements fit well with the objectives of my research and with the methods I am proposing.

Critical Constructivist Research Philosophy

The philosophical perspective known as constructivism focuses on developing knowledge and understanding of the ways in which humans construct, either individually or collectively, views of their social or institutional world. In particular, social constructivism focuses on social process and human interactions. According to Schwandt (1997), "Social constructivism has great affinity with theories of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology that emphasizes the actor's definition of the situation" (p. 19). Schwandt continues, "…constructivists hold that knowledge of the world is not simple reflection of what there is, but a set of social artifacts; a reflection of what we make of what is there" (p. 20). This philosophy is in compete harmony with my research objective of developing a deep understanding of how search committee participants develop meaning for their participation in the search process.

Critical ethnography seeks to develop cultural critique by examining issues of human interaction that focus on oppression, conflict, struggle, and power (Schwandt, 1997; Creswell, 1998). Maseman (1982) suggests that critical ethnography focuses on the functionalism of a phenomena based on "the structure consisting of a set of relations among unit entities, the continuity of the structure being maintained by a life-process

made up of the activities of the constituent units" (p. 2).   A critical approach to my

research is consistent with my observations concerning the apparent lack of diversity in

college executive offices and my desire to develop the kind of understanding that can

inform not only my own work but perhaps inform future search activities at other

colleges.

Choice of Research Methodology: Critical Ethnography

Within the context of my research questions and general objectives of the research

it becomes possible to choose the most appropriate research methodology and research

philosophy. The research method and tradition best suited to the goals and characteristics

of this study is a qualitative critical ethnography conducted in a constructivist framework.

The objective of my research is to develop a rich understanding of the phenomena known

as the president search committee in higher education, particularly in the community

college environment. Deeper understanding of the process, as established by the

individual meaning making of participants, will offer me information and knowledge that

might be used to inform my own professional activities as well as influence future search

activities at other institutions. In the case of a presidential search committee the "life-

process" of the committee is driven by the individual "units", or members. Only an

ethnographic approach offers the opportunity to connect with the units of the process, the

individual participants, in a manner that can yield potentially deep insight into the human

values, priorities, assumptions, and decisions that drive the process. Maseman's

discussion of critical versus conventional ethnography suggests that the conventional

approach leans towards broad understanding with the potential goal of developing a

theory or results that can be generalized to a larger population. Critical ethnography, in

Maseman's construct, goes deeper seeking the kind of rich understanding that comes

from looking past surface views (p. 4-6). Sharp (1982) argues that conventional

ethnography tends to grasp the "phenomenal forms of everyday life" without

comprehending the "inner relations, causal processes, and generative mechanisms which

are often invisible to actors" (p. 48). The concept of critical ethnography calls for focus

on the individual participants in the context of their organization with the purpose of

developing a deep understanding of the inner relations between participants as a means of

understanding the phenomenon of their activity.

Perhaps the most significant point of differentiation between conventional

ethnography and critical ethnography is the inherent emphasis on social critique found in

critical ethnographic research (Anderson, 1989, p. 253). Anderson goes on to say, "The

critical ethnographer's concern with unmasking dominant social constructions and the

interests they represent, studying society with the goal of transforming it…" (p. 254). As

stated earlier, the largely homogeneous population of college presidents appears to be

widely divergent from the reality of the population at-large and certainly from the oft

stated values of the higher education sector promoting diversity of opportunity and

participation throughout society. A conventional ethnographic approach to this study

would risk failing to probe deeply enough into the human constructs, negotiations, and

interactions that are at the heart of the presidential selection process. The beginning point

for this study is the apparent failure of the current process to establish a cadre of higher

education leaders who are representative of the populations they serve and who have the requisite talents to lead complex organizations.

Critical ethnography with its' focus on individuals, recognition of inherent social issues that need to be examined, and developing implications for future practice (Anderson, 1989, p. 257) is a strong fit with the issues and goals of this research. Angus (1986) described the interpretive nature inherent in study of individuals and the interplay of their values and perceptions as, "…to place human actors and their interpretive and negotiating capacities at the center of the analysis" (p. 61). Anderson argues that critical ethnographers are frequently challenged for their tendency towards social critique without developing theories of action that practitioners "can draw upon to develop a 'counter-hegemonic' practice in which dominant structures of classroom and organizational meaning are challenged" (p. 257). This study will seek to avoid this pitfall by openly discussing implications for practice as part of the closing analysis.

An important consideration in the choice of critical ethnography as the most appropriate research method is to clearly identify the audience for this research. Jordan and Yeomans (1995) posit two approaches to preventing "research findings, which disclose sources of power and domination" from "decaying within the research site." They argue that research findings should be developed in the construct of "really important knowledge" which has practical application. Also, they contend that critical ethnography gains value by applying the concepts of "action research" which is a "form of research carried out by practitioners' in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social and educational practices" (p. 400-402).

My choice of the ethnographic tradition may appear inappropriate, if not objectionable, to some because ethnographic methods traditionally involve "a very long period of intimate study and residence in a well-defined community employing a wide range of observation techniques including prolonged face-to-face contact with members of local groups, direct participation in some of the group activities, and a greater emphasis on intensive work with informants than on the use of documentary or survey data" (Conklin, 1968, p. 172). In the case of presidential searches, two distinct conditions make intensive face-to-face observation over an extended period of time impossible. Namely, searches are by their nature short-term events with a defined beginning and end. Moreover, the actual conversations and discourse concerning specific candidates is considered to be highly confidential if not for legal reasons then for ethical considerations over candidate privacy. Consequently, one might argue, ethnographic methods cannot be effectively applied to this study and other traditions should be considered.

However, my own argument is that ethnography with its focus on social construction rooted in anthropological concepts is the only research tradition offering meaningful hope of decoding this critical organizational process and for understanding how participants make sense of the process within their institutional culture. Alternative research traditions, case study being the most obvious choice, focus on events and activities and do not offer the opportunity to gain insights that can be developed through examination of individual activity and perceptions, insights, assumptions, values and beliefs of participants within the context of the ceremonies, rites, symbols, and values that form the basis for their organizational culture. Trice and Breyer (1984) have argued,

"Non-cultural approaches to the study of organizations have failed to sensitize researchers to the full range of meanings embodied in many familiar organizational events." They go on, "Viewing these events as rites and ceremonies suggest possible new meanings and thus holds the promise of yielding new insights into organizations" (p.654).

If I do not take a creative approach by adapting mainstream ethnography to meet the research challenges presented by this particular organizational culture then I am relegated to using less robust, ill-matched techniques. Such an effort would be doomed to obscurity if not outright failure. Sanday (1979, p. 527)) citing Wallace suggested that the commonly accepted paradigm of ethnographic research had its origins in the image of "Frank Boas stepping off the boat in an Eskimo village with his suitcase in hand, preparing for a long stay in residence" (Wallace, 1972, p. 469). Just because one cannot join the search committee "suitcase in hand" are we to abandon the power of ethnographic research with its' emphasis on culture and use less effective methods or, worse, abandon the effort? If so, the black box remains unopened.

Ethnography and the concepts it embodies is a powerful method of examining cultures and for decoding the building blocks of those cultures. The power of academic inquiry is unlocked when researchers build on proven techniques and develop new approaches in order to explore new territories heretofore closer from outside examination. When I acknowledge that it is not possible for myself, as a researcher, to unpack my bags inside the committee room, I must begin the process of adapting and strengthening other aspects of the ethnographic process to compensate for any potential or perceived loss of rigor. For example, Van Maanen (1979) suggests that even in closely observed activity

there is always danger of fiction becoming fact as participants recount their stories and

perceptions. In all cases it is the responsibility of the observer to deal with these issues of

fact when the information is the result of "mediated interpretations" offered by members

of the organization (p. 540). In Van Maanen's paradigm of ethnographic research the

inability to live among the participants and observe face-to-face conversation creates a

gap in "first-order" data (p. 540-544). I recognize the need to replace this direct data with

information derived from detailed interviews with participants who did, in fact, live

through the process. One way of strengthening this information and to counter-check

stories and interpretations will be to use multiple research locations allowing for cross-

evaluation and identification of patterns of thought and activity. Sanday (1979) discussed

Goodenough's approach of "building [the] whole from careful study of the parts" (p.

535). Ideally I would prefer to be an inside observer of search team activities and be able

to report fully on a process from beginning to end. However, because of issues of

confidentiality and privacy, such engagement is not possible. Thus, I am using

Goodenough's approach in that I am carefully studying the parts of the process through

the individual lenses of participants and from an organizational perspective. My research

plan utilizes the power of ethnographic research to examine the parts of presidential

searches in order to develop a perspective of the whole process. It is worth noting, as

mentioned earlier, that Conklin (1968) identified three main aspects of ethnographic

research: face-to-face contact, direct participation in group activities, and greater reliance

on informants. As will be discussed in the next section, my own professional experience

in higher education includes participation on multiple search committees including being

a final candidate in a presidential search. Thus, I am not without at least a portion of the

"living within" experience deemed important in ethnographic research.

One final cautionary note needs to be sounded. Because this study was

extraordinarily dependent on informant-based information, extra attention was given to

the three ways researchers can be misled by informants (Van Maanen, p. 544-545):

1. Informants may seek to cover their own personal failings and flaws.

2. Informants, themselves, may have been misled or are simply wrong.

3. Informants occasionally are unaware of certain aspects of their own activities.

My awareness of these issues was the beginning point of my efforts to protect against

being inadvertently misled by informants. By deliberately choosing to work with at least

three members of each informant group I hoped to develop sufficient perspective of their

descriptions, recollections, and emotional context to identify when a particular informant

might be drifting from the reality of the activity. It is unlikely that all three in a given

group would develop new stories and perceptions that disagree with each other's

accounts. During interviews, I watched for disconnect in their stories, sought to validate

their recollection against extant documents from the search in question, and used careful

follow-up questions to clarify when there seemed to be disparity between stories. The use

of follow-up questions played an important role in my seeking to validate the stories and

recollections of individual informants. Throughout the interviews I asked informants to

describe their recollections in narrative, story form allowing them to describe many of the

events and activities without interruption. The interview process consisted of a formal

interview built on pre-determined questions and, in most cases, a series of clarifying,

follow-up questions conveyed by telephone or written correspondence. As an active

listener, chronicler of their stories, I watched for inconsistencies and used knowledge

from prior interviews to question more deeply their recollections and reactions. The best

protection against the potential for being misled as described by Van Maanan is to push

deeply into the conversations and stories and use probing questions to come at the same

recollection from different directions. In some cases, I chose to re-phrase a question in

order to ask it again seeking to have my informants add different thoughts and

perspectives to answers they had already provide. Another way I chose to pursue the

depth was to simply remain quiet, allowing the informants to fill the space and time with

their own words.

My conclusion is that critical ethnography remains the best choice of research

tradition and that extra attention was necessary in the study design to ensure that the lack

of prolonged residential contact was replaced with rich information developed through

rigorous ethnographic interview and document analysis methods.

The audience for this study is not found in an academic conference. Rather,

largely because in this case I, as the researcher, am also a practitioner involved in

development of a presidential search process the audience clearly includes leaders and

fellow practitioners within my own institution. The broader audience includes

practitioners in other collegiate organizations facing similar issues when developing

presidential search processes.

POSITIONALITY

In addition to understanding the relationship of the researcher to the study it is important to recognize my personal values, assumptions, and biases as a researcher in relation to this study (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). In essence, I am turning the ethnographic lens on myself seeking to develop a deeper understanding of my own perceptions and values as they may apply to this research. As I described myself in Chapter I, I am a white male in my early 60's. As such, I have been raised personally and professionally to believe that I can aspire to any office, seek any position, and expect to be treated with fairness and equality. Only recently, when passing the age of 50, did I personally encounter prejudice or bias, in this case age-based. Yet, even this mild bias, apparent in various professional interviews, does not serve as a deterrent to my aspirations and perception that no doors are closed to me. In essence, I am an insider in the process. I represent a traditional view of the ethnic and professional characteristics of college presidents. In my case, no change of personality, values, or representations is required when I enter an interview room door.

I do hold aspirations to attaining a college presidency and this goal was an initial motivation to pursue a doctorate based on my perception that the degree is virtually a required credential in order to be considered for a presidency. However, after beginning my studies, my own motives and goals for attaining a doctorate shifted. My primary objective with regards to the degree is to use the education and knowledge I have gained, especially with regards to research process, in my work as an executive leader in community colleges. Although I have not abandoned my thought of achieving a

presidency it is more accurate to suggest that I see my future as an executive leader, not a president, with an eventual return to teaching.

I come to the study with a professional background in private industry and, only recently, as a professional in higher education. My initial interest in the topic of presidential succession was the result of an assignment at the onset of my new position as Director of Institutional Effectiveness at a rural, southwestern comprehensive community college. The president assigned me with the responsibility of working with him in development of a succession strategy and plan to be put in place at the time of his retirement (not anticipated for a period of several years). This assignment along with my plans to conduct independent research in support of this dissertation presented a convergence of opportunities.

During the course of my career in private industry I had direct experience as both the interviewer and interviewee in a variety of executive selection processes including individual interviews, committee interviews, and group interviews of candidates. Perhaps the most interesting interview process I encountered was the system used by Microsoft wherein candidates were subjected to a series of intense individual interviews by executives from throughout the Microsoft world. During the 1-2 days of interviews the interviewers use sophisticated electronic systems to maintain continual communications. These ongoing communications inform subsequent interviews and lines of inquiry thus making the process very structured yet flexible. I come to the higher education sector with the sense that there are a number of effective executive selection systems none of which is vastly preferred over another.

During my time in higher education I have been on both sides of the search committee interview table as both an interviewee and as an interviewer and, in one case, as chair of a search process. I have witnessed successful searches and failed searches as well. I did not come to this study with a conviction one way or the other as to the effectiveness of the search process. I do accept it as a norm in high level executive searches in public higher education and, as such, as a process well worthy of study. The only skepticism I have towards search committee process is the same as I have towards any executive selection process, whether in private industry or public higher education. That is, does the constructed process have the ability to identify and select the best possible candidate? Insofar as the search committee process is the one that will ultimately be deployed in our own succession process at my institution it becomes ever more important to understand the internal workings in order to identify strengths and weaknesses of the process.

As I began examination of the process I was immediately struck by the singular homogeneity of the demographics of current college presidents. Given the intense focus on fairness, diverse hiring practices, and my own experience growing up through the early civil rights battles and desegregation and equal opportunity I was admittedly surprised at the "white maleness" of college executive leadership, a sector I would have expected to be in the forefront of diversity. This reality added a level of personal interest for the study on my part. Within recent time, I have been an interview finalist in a presidential search process. As a candidate I am certainly convinced of the legitimacy of my own application yet, at the same time, I have to recognize that I am but "one more aging, white

male presidential candidate." Am I at the final table because of my credentials or because of my demographics, or both? More to the point, how can I assure that my own participation in the development of a new search at my own campus will be structured to ensure the best possible candidates without regard to their demographic profile and will not be guided by my own, subjective view of the world?

Research Methods

In-depth understanding of a topic or activity using qualitative research methods is best achieved using a process of data triangulation (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990). In this study, consistent with Creswell's and Patton's guidance, triangulation will be achieved using multiple methods to study the search committee process: interviews of participants internal to the committee, interviews of participants external to the committee process, and review of public documents associated with search processes at selected institutions.

DATA COLLECTION – INTERVIEWS AND DOCUMENTS

Interviews.

Spradley (1979) notes that virtually anyone can be an informant in an ethnographic study but not everyone can be a good informant (p. 45). Thus the selection of good informants is an issue that has direct impact on the quality of the study. In addition, Spradley speaks to the issue of interview quality. According to Spradley, effective interviewing in qualitative research involves the ability of the interviewer to develop rapport with the informant and the ability to elicit information from the informant (p. 78). Rapport, or trust, between the interviewer and informant is crucial to developing a free flow of information. Spradley suggests several principles for building

trust including, "keep informants talking; make repeated explanations; restate what

informants say; and don't ask for meaning, ask for use" (p. 83). Spradley identified three

primary types of questions used in qualitative inquiry; descriptive, structural, and

contrast. Descriptive questions are used in all ethnographic interviews and allow the

research to record the informant's language and representations. Structural questions

delve into how informants organize their knowledge and are frequently repeated

throughout the interview. Finally, the third primary type of question is contrast. Contrast

questions are used to delve into the meaning of terms of language used by the interviewer

(p. 60). Spradley proposes that structural and descriptive questions work well when used

in conjunction with each other – the concurrent principle – and that it is best to alternate

the types of questions during the interview process (p. 120-121).

In this study, all three primary types of questions are utilized. A pre-determined

list of questions was identified for each of the two primary informant groups (see

Appendix A): committee participants and process participants (i.e., search consultants

and successful presidential candidates). Although the primary list of questions was pre-

determined, I allowed for the development of new questions during the course of the

interview process. This evolution of inquiry created an opportunity for deeper

examination of information revealed during the interview process. In all cases, the

interviews were conducted by me as the primary researcher. Interviews with each

informant were conducted in person or, when necessary, by telephone. Interview sessions

ran for approximately 90 minutes in each case and follow-up questions for clarification

were conveyed through correspondence or telephone conversation depending on the

preference of the informant. Transcriptions of specific quotations and comments were

sent to participants for review and annotation in order to confirm that the meaning and

intent of their comments had been properly documented by the researcher.

Selection of interview participants.

The central activity of this research involved interviews of presidential search

committee members at two mid-size (3,000 – 5,000 students) comprehensive community

colleges in the southwestern United States. Interviews with internal search committee

members included three board members, two faculty members, and three staff members.

The participants were mixed between the two primary research sites and an independent

college. I chose this particular mix of informants in order to gain a broad set of

perspectives of the search process from both within and external to the colleges. In

addition to the committee participant interviews, interviews were conducted with three

classes of participants who were not members of the search committees; executive

recruiters who specialize in supporting search processes for college presidencies, non-

committee observers of the process, and incumbent community college presidents.

Selection of the subject community colleges and individual informants was accomplished

using a process of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990, p. 169-186; Creswell, 1998, p. 62)

focusing on strategies of identifying typical cases and achieving maximum variation in

informants by capturing key differences in the backgrounds of search committee members

(e.g., faculty members, community members, institutional staff, and executive

leadership). The objective of this purposeful sampling was to identify institutions and

individuals who offered a richness of experience and knowledge relevant to the study of presidential search processes.

Although my primary interview activity was focused on two community colleges and on two external professional search consultants, I included key informants from one other college chosen not on the basis of their college affiliation but because of their search experience. The presence of these informants helped to provide additional insight and, in some cases, served as a means of counter-checking the experiences of the primary informants at the two primary research sites. These "off-site" informants included a faculty member who served on a search committee, an executive team member who served on a presidential search in another state and who, himself, was a presidential candidate, and an incumbent president who shared his experiences involved in his own selection as well as his current search experience as a candidate. It is important to note that I also am a source of data and information insofar as I have served as a member of search committees, as a presidential finalist, and as a close advisor to an incumbent president currently seeking a new position.

Document review.

The primary documents reviewed were the postings and advertisements announcing presidential vacancies and soliciting applications at fifty three community college institutions engaged in presidential searches over the past three years. These postings generally set forth the required and preferred qualifications for candidates and, frequently, provided narrative description of opportunities and challenges at the institution. Position announcements are commonly the first product of the collective

action of the search committee. As such, these documents constitute the public face of

the search process by announcing to stakeholders and interested parties what criteria the

committee has established for candidates, the general process to be followed, and the

timetable for the search. An important aspect of the document review was examination

of the language of the documents in order to identify whether or not the documents

reflected a gender bias or preference through the use of masculine oriented language.

Allan, Gordon, and Iverson (2006) discuss the representation of traits that characterize the

dominant version of Western masculinity. They note that qualities such as "competitive,

tough, strong, aggressive, in control, courageous, and able to withstand pain" are

associated with masculinity (p. 50-51). My purpose in examining the documents was to

determine to what extent these phrases, or similar terms, were present. Did search

documents convey a not-so-subtle preference for certain types of candidates?

Two common public venues are used for posting higher education presidential

search announcements: www.chronicle.com and www.higheredjobs.com.

Announcements posted on each venue were collected representing searches each of which

took approximately 9 – 12 months to complete. The resulting collection of

announcements and supporting documents, representing fifty three separate searches, was

analyzed for content related to preferred qualifications, required qualifications,

description of institutional context, and search timetable. I began with examination of

documents and archives related to the search process at the primary research sites.

Analysis of these documents helped provide context for identification of common

language, central themes, use of gender-specific terms, and identification of preferred

candidate characteristics.

The document review was conducted prior to the interview process. Preliminary

analysis of documents offered several advantages for the research process. Specifically,

Analysis of position documents served to inform the development of interview questions

and results of the document analysis also served to establish an understanding of search

objectives against which participant actions and committee outcomes could be evaluated.

In addition, examination of documents allowed me to evaluate their contents against the

broad lists of presidential characteristics outlined by Vaughan and Weisman (2003),

Canegmi (2001), and Hahn (1995). Results of the document analysis served as an

important component in the process of triangulating information which, in turn, is

important to the process of establishing validity of this research.

SITES OF THE STUDY

By focusing on two comprehensive community colleges in the study it is my goal

to probe as deeply as possible into the experience, values, and activities of the search

committee process.   The final research structure included three community college sites,

three college presidents, three board members, three faculty members, three staff

members, and two executive recruiters with national practices in higher education. A

prime objective of the sample selection was to secure the participation of institutions that

have completed presidential searches within the prior three to five years. This time

parameter helped to ensure that individual informants had recent recollections of their

participation and also capture changes in the process that have occurred in recent

experience. The size and characteristics of the institutions selected for the study were

determined by similarity to my home institution. To the extent that similarity of

organizational characteristics contributes to the external validity of the research, the

degree to which information from the study may be compared to circumstances at other

institutions, the information gained from the research can be used to inform my

professional activities outside the boundaries of the study. This approach is congruent

with the tenets of critical ethnography, as outlined by Anderson (1989, p. 253-254),

insofar as a major objective of critical ethnographic research is to permit the researcher to

study social constructions with the goal of transforming those constructions in order to

improve social and organizational conditions. I have the opportunity to apply the

knowledge gained from this study at my home institution where a new presidential search

will be conducted within the next two years. Additionally, I hope that the findings and

insights of this research will help inform future search activities at other institutions.

It is important to note that all interviews focused on the perceptions and

experiences of individual participants and not on the activities or deliberations of specific

candidates in the search. Care was taken to avoid discussion of particular candidacies or

incumbent presidents. The goal of the interviews was to gain knowledge of participant

backgrounds, individual values and priorities, the nature of participant interaction with

fellow committee members, their perceptions of whether or not the process supported the

stated goals of the search, and other insights that emerged from the discussions. As stated

earlier, interviews were conducted using a pre-determined set of questions although, in

every case, unique questions emerged from the conversations. Consistent with a

constructivist research philosophy and design, I followed questions as they emerged during interviews if they were related to the focus of this research. Interviews of search committee members included one each from major stakeholder groups as identified in the process including faculty members, executive team members, institutional staff members, community members, and incumbent presidents. Although this process of ensuring variation in sample selection is important to the integrity of the study it is worth noting that the self-established limit against basing questions on specific search outcomes might have resulted in difficulty, if not outright failure, to identify pieces of the information puzzle. A key strategy in overcoming this potential limitation began with my own awareness of the issue and conscious adjustment of questions to push as close to the edge of confidentiality as possible without crossing the line. To further ensure that issues of confidentiality and sensitive information were not breached and to avoid the risk of readers drawing inferences about named individuals, all names and institutional identifiers have been removed from the final writing.

Research plans also called for interviews of two executive search recruiters specializing in higher education presidential searches and interviews with individuals not associated with the primary research sites yet who had similar search experience. The objective of these interviews was to add perspectives of the search process from key participants who were not active members of the search committees at the primary research sites. The insights and experiences of executive recruiters provided information that added depth of understanding as well as clarity to an occasionally confusing process. At the same time, the comments and observations of professionals who have experience

with search processes at other institutions helped to confirm whether or not core

interviews with committee participants did, in fact, create an "authentic representation of

some reality" as described by LeCompte & Goetz (1982, p. 32). Interviews with

incumbent presidents offered an important perspective insofar as they were able to

comment on whether or not the search process they experienced presented a reasonable

and accurate portrayal of the challenges and opportunities present on their campus when

they took office. Further, much as with the interviews of executive recruiters, interviews

with incumbent presidents added information that could confirm, or refute, if the core

interviews offered a valid description of search committee reality.

RESEARCH PROCESS

After identifying two colleges as potential participants, I contacted the respective

college presidents by mail to determine if each was willing to consent to my research

taking place on their campus. My correspondence described the nature of my study and

requested formal consent to conduct research on their campus. In both cases, the

president agreed to my request and acted to connect me with potential informants on each

campus. In both cases I was provided a list of informants along with contact information.

I made direct contact with each informant, provided each with a description of my study

and asked if they would agree to participate. In all instances, except one, I was able to

make contact with the informants and secured their agreement to participate. The one

instance where I failed to make contact was the result of a heavy travel schedule by the

potential informant and we simply failed to make contact in time for his participation in

the study. As I will describe later, one of the interesting findings from my research

emerged from the enthusiastic, uniform agreement by all informants to participate in the

process. This outcome, somewhat unexpected because of the verbal cautions I had

received from colleagues, is nevertheless consistent with the research experience of

McLaughlin and Riesman (1985) who reported, "…many busy search committee

chairmen were eager to share their search experience with us" (p. 347).

When meeting with informants, I provided them with an explanation of the study,

discussed potential issues and risks, benefits, statement of confidentiality and records,

compensation, and contact information. I reviewed the specific research consent form

(see Appendix B) and secured consent confirming their willingness to participate in the

study and acknowledging the information that I had provided to them.

Interviews were recorded in notes, and in some cases verbal recording with later

transcription. Data is confidential and stored in a file at my home residence in private

storage separate from all personal files. Data and records will be maintained for a period

of five years following completion of the dissertation. Names of all participants and their

respective institutions are reported as pseudonyms in this study.

By serving as the collector of all data, I was able to engage processes which

helped to provide consistency of information from the varied sources and, at the same

time, aided in control of confidential information. During the interview process, I

compiled descriptive and reflective field notes. Descriptive field notes included portraits

of the informants, reconstruction of dialogue, accounts of particular events and the

observer's behavior (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 1-48). Reflective notes included

analysis, my reactions to the comments offered, and my frame of mind during the course

of the interview.

Data analysis.

Creswell (1998) notes that no consensus exists on the best method to conduct data

analysis of qualitative research (p. 140). Citing Huberman and Miles (1994), Creswell

says, "Data analysis is not off-the-shelf; rather, it is custom-built, revised and

choreographed" (p. 142). He does suggest that a reasonable beginning point for analysis

might be to read through all data and information in order to gain a sense of the broad

themes and potential patterns. Creswell suggests that making reflective notes in the

margins is a method for collecting thoughts (p. 140).

My analysis for this study began with inductive data examination to make sense of

the field data from interviews, participant's observations, and documents (Lincoln and

Guba, 1985, p. 202). I used Creswell's (1998) outline of general steps in analysis and

representation of data collected in an ethnographic study (p. 148-149): create and

organize files for data, read through text and make reflective notes, describe the social

setting, actors, events; draw pictures of the setting, analyze data for themes and patterned

regularity, interpret and make sense of the findings, and present narrative findings.

A key objective of the analysis was to develop a thick description of the search committee

process as viewed through the eyes of participants and observers. The process of analysis

followed the general outline as set forth by Creswell. I consulted participant interviews

throughout the process of analysis to confirm whether or not my reflective notes did, in

fact, serve as legitimate representations of reality as experienced by the informant. It is

important to note that I used both an anthropological lens to systematically look for

underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions and an organizational lens to analyze the

process.

Validity and reliability of the study.

As described earlier, this study deployed three key processes in support of validity

of the research: triangulation of data, review of transcriptions by informants, and thick

description of findings. Triangulation was achieved through interviews of informants

internal to the search committee process, interviews of search participants external to the

committees, and through review of documents. Review of interview notes by informants

supported validity of the study (Creswell, 1998, p. 211). Compilation of a rich, thick

description of findings allows readers to make their own determination of validity as well

as potential transferability of the findings (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). Throughout the

course of my research I have submitted various findings and analytical thoughts to peers

in order to receive their feedback and commentary concerning the validity of my research

process and findings. In particular, I was looking for commentary that suggested my

findings were contrary to peer perceptions of reality.

Although critical ethnography is by far the methodology that best fits the issues

and context of college presidential search processes the methodology is not without issues

of validity and reliability that must be addressed if the research and findings are to be

meaningful. Questions of validity and reliability frequently challenge ethnographers

(Creswell, 1998, p. 210; LeCompte and Goetz, 1982, p. 32; Jordan and Yeomans, 1995,

p. 389). LeCompte and Goetz define reliability as "the extent to which studies can be

replicated" (p. 35) and validity as "demonstration that the proposition generated, refined, or tested match the causal conditions which obtain in human life" (p. 43). They go on to suggest that although ethnographers face substantive issues of reliability that researchers are frequently able to develop well constructed ethnographic studies with high external validity (p. 43). LeCompte and Goetz distinguish between issues of internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the extent that observations are "authentic representation of some reality" while external validity refers to "the degree to which such representations may be compared legitimately across groups" (p. 32).

Creswell (1998) identifies eight distinct verification techniques that can be used in combination to develop validity of an ethnographic study. He proposes that qualitative researchers engage at least two of the following procedures in their study: triangulation of multiple and different sources and methods, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias from the outset, member checks wherein informant's views of credibility and findings are solicited, rich, thick description that allows the reader to make decisions about transferability, and external audits. Creswell suggests that triangulation of data sources, writing detailed, thick description and taking the narrative back to participants are the most common and reasonably simple procedures to conduct (p. 201-203). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) also describe techniques that support development of a qualitative study with high internal validity. But their discussion begins with an argument that the foundation of a strong study is built on the recognition that ethnography emphasizes the interplay of variables in a natural context, and that ethnographers should avoid assuming "a priori constructs or relationships." Also,

ethnographers should realize that the goal of their research is for "comparability and translatability of their findings rather than for outright transference to groups not investigated" (p. 33-34). LeCompte and Goetz (p. 35-48) offer their own construction of potential issues that may, if not managed properly, contaminate the study and undermine the reliability and validity of the research: clear identification of the relationship of the researcher to the study, wise choice of informants, understanding the social situation and conditions which may influence informant and/or and depth of response, explicit identification of assumptions and any theories, clear identification of methods of data collection and analysis, use of low inference descriptors, use of multiple researchers, peer examinations, mechanically recorded data, observer effects, thoughtful identification of a range of possible informants so as to obtain data from all participant types, and avoiding spurious conclusions.

My research for this study engaged the common techniques identified by Creswell – triangulation, presentation of rich, thick description, and review of narrative by participants – as core techniques supporting validity and reliability of the study. In addition, the study took into account the possible areas of contamination identified by LeCompte and Goetz. By conducting all interviews myself I was able to avoid issues associated with use of multiple researchers. I engaged a range of informants including search committee members, external search consultants, and reflections from a candidate who was not selected a recent search. Throughout my research I paid close attention to these issues as well as the others raised by LeCompte and Goetz.

Summary

The appropriate research method and tradition for this study was that of critical ethnography in a constructivist framework. Research was conducted focusing on participant and observer interviews as well as document research and analysis. Significant attention to issues of validity and reliability was given to the design and conduct of the study as well as to the process of analysis. I recognized that I have a professional relationship to the topic of the study as well as personal experiences with various aspects of the search process both in private industry and higher education. The end objective of the research was to develop a rich description of higher education search activities from the view of process participants and external observers with the goal of being able to inform a presidential search process at my own institution that is designed and implemented with the singular aim of finding and selecting the best possible presidential candidate without regard for their demographic profile, and if appropriate serve to inform other individuals and institutions engaged in similar activities.

CHAPTER IV

Voices from Within: A Verbal Fabric of Patterns and Images

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Voices from Within: A Verbal Fabric of Patterns and Images

The presidential search process is one recognized by many and yet the inner workings remain mysterious to external observers and, as I discovered, occasionally to even those who actively participate. Individually, search participants tell interesting, insightful, occasionally humorous, and emotion-laden stories of their experiences as search committee members, presidential aspirants, or external observers. Taken individually, these voices describe in insightful detail how an important institutional process works to identify and select the next best leader of the college. Yet, as became obvious to me, individual voices create a perception of the search process that is relatively matter-of-fact, almost purely organizational in nature. By listening to individual voices we may develop a reasonable understanding of the organizational activities of a search process but we fall far short of developing any meaningful understanding of the process, how participant's values and experiences affect the process, how participants themselves are affected by the process, how the process evolves from, and at the same time supports, the culture of the organization. It is when the voices, stories, emotions, values, and perceptions of the participants are woven into a fabric revealing patterns and images that we can begin to recognize and comprehend the meaning and role of the search process within the culture of the institution. The resonance and harmony of the voices, as well as the discord and discontent that is revealed when the voices are brought together begin to reveal the search process as far more than a simple organizational activity. We begin to recognize that the presidential

search process is more an iconic ritual that may have as much meaning and importance in

and of itself as does the actual result of the search. In her discussion of rituals in higher

education, Manning (2000) describes two forms of rituals that fit well with my emerging

understand of the search process. Manning describes rituals of reification as ones that,

"assure participants that, particularly in the context of their present living or working

environment, their choices are of value." Within the context of a presidential search the

process serves to legitimize or attach value to the ultimate outcome of the search in the

form of a new president. Manning goes on to discuss rituals of revitalization. She said,

"Through formal and informal means, these rituals revitalize the college's founding

values, restate and update underlying assumptions, and enlist new recruits in the belief

structure of the institution" (p. 5). Most assuredly search committees with their

development of college profiles and preferred candidate characteristics act to evaluate,

discuss, and formalize values, assumptions, and perceptions of the future. Further, as the

committee moves through the steps of the process the members pay close attention to

issues of transparency, engagement, and communication in an effort to solicit and secure

external support for the process as well as the final selection.

One of the challenges I found in this study is the movement back and forth

between ethnographic discussions and purely organizational concepts and structures. The

reality I found is that even as individual participants shared their reactions, personal

thoughts, and perceptions they did so within the context of an organizational activity. I

realized that it is not possible to disconnect organizational analysis from the study even

though the focus was on the individuals who participated in the process.   My own

thinking evolved insofar as I realized that by adding discussion of organizational issues I

could develop a far more revealing analysis. When the voices are brought together within

the context of the organizational activities a far more interesting, insightful, and

compelling view of the search process emerges. During the course of my interviews I

found that informants moved back and forth between personal insights and comments on

organizational issues. This movement was often confusing and during the course of my

analysis I had to spend significant time separating ethnographic and organizational issues.

I have chosen to separate the analysis into a discussion of anthropological findings and

then a second section with the added findings related to organizational issues. My overall

focus remains on deeper, ethnographic and anthropological concepts concerning how the

process, or ritual, is driven by the individual values, emotions, and perceptions of the

individuals involved and how those individuals are affected, if not changed, by their

participation in the process. By adding the discussion of organizational issues I am able

to describe the context within which these individual informants lived the search process.

In the following pages my informants will appear as individuals and, at the same

time, as part of a ritual process that plays a critical role in helping to define, reinforce, and

change the culture of the institution. Themes, patterns of activity, values, and emotions

merged to help me develop my understanding, which is subsequently expressed as

findings from my research. One of the major contributions of my research is the singular

act of bringing these voices together in a way which would not occur naturally. In point

of fact, as my study began to take form there were those who suggested that I would not

even be able to hear the individual voices much less bring them together.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

I approached this study from an emergent standpoint without preconceived notion about what I would find during the course of my research. As I began the study I acknowledged that I did, in fact, have some personal experience in the search process but I endeavored to distance myself from allowing these experiences to influence the process of listening to my informants and from making pre-judgments about what I expected to hear. In some cases, my findings seem logical and fit well with my own experience and sense of presidential search processes. In other cases, I have been surprised by my findings and, to an extent, concerned about the implications that emerged from participant narrative. From the verbal fabric created by my informants coupled with my study of public documents I have discovered an interesting and, I think, provocative set of findings.

From the start of my research, I found that participants in presidential searches have a strong desire to give voice to their stories and experiences in high contrast to the suggestion that informants would not and could not speak of their experience. I was impressed with not only their narrative but the emotional intensity with which they told their stories. I came to understand that within the college culture the presidential search process is not a simple, corporate-like activity. The ritual of a presidential search is an emotional activity for both participants and observers. As my research ran its' course, tribal themes and concepts emerged as a form of cultural construction that helps make sense of the search process and its' ritualistic role in collegiate culture. My research suggests that the search activity, composed of commonly

accepted practices, is a flawed process that has taken on such iconic stature that its

activities and practices are considered unassailable. A more complex finding involved

my realization that the search process undergoes a subtle, yet crucial, shift when the early

stage of gathering a broad pool of candidates transitions to a process of individual

evaluation and elimination. The final candidate becomes a legitimate selection in the

eyes of the constituents. Finally, my research suggests that candidates feel compelled to

cloak themselves in the expectations of the search committee.

What follows is a comprehensive discussion of my research which included

informant interviews, document analysis, and real-time personal observation of an active

presidential search through the eyes of a candidate cum finalist cum selectee. Numerous

themes emerged the most dominant that the true significance of the search process lay in

its' ceremonial role and symbolic representation of the culture of the institution. Over

decades of evolution, beginning in the early 1950's, the college presidential search

process has become a central, binding, legitimizing ritual that observers and participants

alike accept as the best means of balancing constituent interests with organizational need

to select a new leader. Each informant made a point of stating that the presidential search

process involving representatives from all constituent groups must exist in the college

culture. Absence of the process, they suggested, would undermine if not destroy the

legitimacy of the new president.

The Culture of Presidential Searches

OPENING THE BLACK BOX – LEGALITIES, ETHICS, AND

CONFIDENTIALITY

One of the most intriguing and significant indicators of the ritualistic, almost

sacred place presidential searches hold in the life of the campus emerged in the early

stages of my research. Prior to the beginning of my first interview I found myself being

cautioned, by writers as well as colleagues, that searches are confidential, committee

members cannot discuss their participation, and that my research would fail because

potential informants would be reluctant or might even refuse to speak of their

experiences. One faculty colleague suggested, "It is illegal for search committee

members to discuss any aspect of their participation in the process." That discussion of

individual candidacies and final personnel decisions should remain confidential seems

intuitively valid especially given the litigious nature of our society and the aversion to

legal challenges felt by most organizations. I was intrigued by my colleague's declarative

statement that it is illegal for search committee members to discuss any aspect of their

participation. I considered that there might be two aspects to the use of the word, illegal.

The most obvious interpretation would be that there is some form of statutory limitation

against search committee members discussing their experience. Consequently, I reviewed

New Mexico State statutes and found no such constraint. The second possible

interpretation might be that specific university policy might block such discussion. In this

case, I chose to examine University of New Mexico policies and found the following

limitation embedded in the UNM Board of Regents' Policy Manual, section 1.4, "Under

all circumstances, letters of reference, the deliberations of the search committee, and

other similar evaluative materials shall be kept confidential with respect to all candidates.

Preliminary interviews of candidates by the search committee or any member or

subcommittee of the search committee prior to the public identification of finalists shall

also be confidential." My conclusion was that the issue at hand, confidentiality, related to

aspects of the search that were evaluative in nature as related to specific candidates.

Thus, as I had already determined to avoid any discussion of specific candidacies I

believed that I could move forward and seek informants who could help me make sense

of this process through recounting their own experiences and perceptions. All that

remained would be to determine if informants would, in fact, be willing to discuss their

experiences. The successful outcome of my search for informants was actually surprising

given the level of prior negative warnings and cautionary notes. Perhaps one of my more

interesting findings is that the shroud of secrecy that covers the search process results not

from legal constraints or from self-imposed silence by participants but more from a

heretofore treatment of the process more as an organizational ceremony not meant to be

questioned as if such inquiry might somehow undermine the integrity or legitimacy of the

process.

The reality is that each informant I approached was not only willing to talk about

their experience but passionate about their views and, in numerous cases, openly

appreciative of the opportunity to discuss the process. One of the more common

comments I heard was approval by the informants of my research. Both consultants

spoke of the potential value of the research and openly spoke of their experience with the

caveat that they could not discuss individual candidacies. In several instances, informants

said that the research of this study is needed and can serve an important role in helping to

inform future search activities. One board member from City College said, "I really like

your dissertation topic and know how important it is for colleges to go through a very

thorough process that is driven by integrity and inclusiveness." Both executive search

consultants readily agreed to participate with the proviso of personal anonymity and

strictures against discussion of individual candidacies. The West Consultant who

engaged in deliberate research of presidencies said, "Your study is valuable insofar as no

one has really looked into the role of search committees and how they function." What I

found from the moment of my first interview was a universal interest in discussing their

experiences, an implied if not outright gratitude for the opportunity to share their views,

an intellectual engagement that went far beyond my lists of pre-determined questions, a

genuine sense that search committees are an important fixture in the academic world, and

a passion for the conversation that forced me, in every case, to be the one calling a halt to

the discussion. To a person, my informants were professional, open, passionate about

their views, and consistent in their belief that more open examination of search processes

can actually strengthen the integrity and legitimacy of future search activities.

SEARCH INTEGRITY: THE FOUNDATION

Although they used varied terminology, all informants spoke directly to issues

involving integrity of the search process. Two common themes emerged from

informants. The first theme is that the tangible and perceived integrity of the search is

foundational to the ultimate success or failure of the process. The second common theme

is that a keystone to search legitimacy is a high level of transparency in the process.

However, I do not consider these two themes, despite their obvious importance, to be the

most interesting or even the most important findings to emerge from this part of my

informant discussions. In virtually all instances, when the discussions turned to issues

related to the integrity of the search process, informants' language shifted. They became

more intense, used declarative statements and highly emotive language as if to emphasize

their points. Far more frequently than during other parts of the interviews, I heard

informants express strong, unequivocal statements. Words such as "criminal," and "high-

jacking," came up more than once. City College board members clearly stated that they

were not "going to tolerate a dishonest process."   In fact, I consider that one of my most

significant findings relates not to a particular aspect of the process but to my growing

sense that the search and participant interaction is an intensely emotional activity that

draws on a wide range of human emotions and values including loyalty, pride, frustration,

anger, fear, compassion, and self-worth among many others. Regardless of the particular

topic at hand, each informant spoke of personal priorities and reactions to the process in a

manner that suggested to me that they had strong emotional investment in their

participation and in the outcome of the process.

City College President began our dialogue concerning search integrity when she

suggested, "There are two types of searches, ethical and unethical." She went on

immediately,

Perhaps those words are too strong. What I am trying to suggest is that I believe

there are two broad categories of searches. The first is composed of those

searches conducted with a level of transparency and openness that supports the

perception of the activity as ethical. Others are searches conducted in the dark,

out of sight. These are unethical. For me, the ethical nature of a search is

paramount but it is critical that outsiders recognize that the search has been

conducted in an ethical manner. It is not enough to be ethical, the search must be

seen and accepted as ethical.

From my own perspective of our conversation her opening choice of words suggested the

depth of her convictions. The emotional tone and content of her words portrayed her

condemnation of processes conducted in an unethical manner. One City College board

member also spoke of the requirement for the process to be as open as possible in order to

engender stakeholder support for the process as well as to, "avoid back room deals." She

said,

I know open searches have issues in terms of protecting candidates but the reality

is that it is more important for the process to be seen as legitimate by the college

community and by those who are not in the meetings. I'm not sure how to

balance these issues but in the final analysis we have to come down on the side of

openness.

The board member spoke of a prior search that had been conducted without integrity

which fostered a commitment that the most recent search must operate with high

integrity. For this board member the issues of integrity were manifested in a written code

of ethics adopted openly by the search committee and by a commitment to transparency

of the process. The other City College board member emphasized that integrity of the

process depends on three critical issues: 1) as much openness as possible in the process,

2) ethical behavior of the individuals involved, and 3) making sure that participants

worked only as part of the larger group and not in smaller cliques. The City College

president stated that the search process is "easily corruptible." She was not suggesting

corruption in the sense of illegal action but, rather, in the context that "people are capable

of great craft and guile and will use the traits to achieve their own ends." She also said

that a major issue in searches is that candidates become very skilled at "telling people

what they want to hear." For her, one answer to the problem is to create a sizeable search

committee with legitimate representation of all key stakeholders groups. The larger size

committee, she argued, makes it harder to be manipulated by special interests or

individual members. City College Faculty emphasized the need for the search process to

be conducted with integrity and be perceived as a legitimate process by the external

observers. He noted that the search committee was considered to be a representative

group and that the overall process was conducted with an openness and transparency that

had not been present in prior searches.

Rural College president also spoke to issues of search legitimacy and integrity.

He discussed the dynamic tension of transparency, "A completely open search from start

to finish is bad because it limits the initial pool of candidates. Only the finalists can

afford the risk of being seen as looking." He acknowledged the need for some level of

transparency but saved his most declarative statements for the composition of the search

committee. He said, "A search with no constituent committee is a recipe for failure. A

good committee serves as a source of legitimacy for both the candidate and the board

when the final candidate is selected." His language had shifted from passive observation to declaration. "Recipe for failure" leaves little doubt about his views and, at the same time, serves notice concerning his own professional and emotional commitment to the search process. The Rural College staff member had participated in two presidential searches and his narrative became far more personal and intense during our discussion of search integrity. He offered a very personal insight to describe his sense of risk in participating as a member of the search process. For him,

> It is really important for the process to be as open as possible. Internal and external folks must see the process and have confidence that it is fair and representative of their issues and interests. But I can tell you from personal experience that when there is an internal candidate that things can become very uncomfortable very quickly.

He continued,

> Strong internal candidates are great but they put committee members in a very tough spot. Many times, we are friends with the internal candidates. And if [we] talk against them, much less choose against them, we still have to work with that person when the dust settles.

What I heard in this conversation suggested that the staff member felt loyalty, conflict, discomfort and even a sense of risk resulting from his participation in the process. He was uneasy in relying on his fellow committee members to maintain the full confidentiality of his statements and role in the deliberations. All these are negative feelings and are tied to the emotions of the search committee member. There is no doubt

that this staff member supported the search process and that he believes the search

process is key to selecting a leader who is perceived as legitimate. However, it was

evident to me that my informant felt that participation in the process posed a very distinct

risk to him in terms of how his participation might affect his personal relationships with

internal candidates and fellow committee members. This risk created personal stress and

a sense of internal conflict between personal loyalties and friendships versus commitment

to a committee process.

The most emotional terms used to describe issues with search integrity were

expressed by the executive search consultants. Over the course of several conversations I

noted words and phrases such as "corruption", "highjacked", "personal agendas",

"revenge", "retribution", and "the base nature of people". Most certainly these are strong

words. They take on added significance when it is recognized that the consultants have

experience with a far greater number of searches than any of the other informants. For

these words to be used by individuals with extensive experience suggests that the

concepts are relatively widespread.

In response to my question about common reasons for searches to fail, East

Consultant said,

> Constituents highjack the process at the back end. The most frequent corruption
>
> of the process relates to diversity. Boards and institutions say they want diverse
>
> candidates but, in the final analysis, if they were honest with themselves they
>
> would admit that they would not hire a diverse candidate.

For him, a diverse candidate is considered to be a female and/or an ethnic minority. He

also noted that for many search committees issues of religious identity may cast a

candidate into an ethnic minority or diverse category. He went on to list some additional

corrupting factors including: public vetting of candidates that may create opportunities for

character assassination, the presence of one person with a plan or an "ax to grind" who

can create great turmoil in the process, and faculty members who seek to highjack the

process for singular issues.

East Consultant hastened to suggest that such corruption is not frequent but that it

does occur. East Consultant suggested that issues of personal agenda can challenge the

integrity of the process. She said, "The more people involved, the more opportunity for

the process to be corrupted by personal agendas." I found this comment to be intriguing

given prior comments that broad participation on the search committee is important in the

establishment of legitimacy and integrity. West Consultant saved her most pointed

comments for uses related to the openness of searches. She said, "Most searches involve

public dollars and have to be open. I get that. But we don't live in a perfect world.

There is revenge, retribution, and other forms of punishment for candidates and

participants in the process. Just look at what is happening in Illinois." As of this writing,

a group in Illinois is trying to obtain the list of over 200 names for over 200 candidates

for the presidency at the University of Illinois. West Consultant went on,

> This disclosure serves no productive purpose. The desire to see the whole list
>
> speaks to our baser nature as people. It is like watching a train wreck. If this
>
> happens then the best-of-the-best won't look at great opportunities. People need

to take stock of the human issues associated with searches. People can get hurt in

the process and sometimes it is like we simply don't care.

It is interesting that the consultant interprets the desire for a full disclosure of the list as

an example of a dark side of human nature. For her, there is no purpose to full disclosure

except simple curiosity, if not voyeurism. It is possible that those seeking full disclosure

are attempting to determine if diverse candidates were present in the process, if the

process gave fair consideration to a range of candidates, or simply to confirm that the

process did gather more than the final number of candidate who were identified as part of

the pool. In any event, the issue of transparency and openness is controversial and

definitely part of the ongoing public debate about the integrity of presidential searches.

McLendon and Hearn (2006) asked,

> Does the availability of *more* information always advance the public interest?
>
> They said Cleveland (1985) observed that the [sunshine] laws, when applied to
>
> public colleges and universities, pose for society a *trilemma.* Cleveland meant
>
> that mandated openness in higher education creates an inherent tension among
>
> three desirable, but often competing, societal objectives: ensuring public
>
> accountability, protecting individual privacy rights, and providing institutions the
>
> autonomy they need to achieve their public purpose (p. 651).

Those seeking the information may not be acting on their base instincts, as suggested by

the consultant, but rather seeking to meet one of the objectives identified by Cleveland,

ensuring public accountability, at the expense of another, and/or protecting individual

privacy. The issue certainly is vexing, emotional for the participants, and potentially

worthy of deeper examination in future studies.

During the course of my interviews I often observed that towards the end of the

discussion more than one informant would pause, lean forward suggesting they might be

about to reveal a personal insight or relate a significant experience. But, in each instance

the comments related to their belief that a formal search process, with representative

committee, and attendant transparency is an absolute requirement. Rural President said

simply, "A president has to be chosen by a search process." City College President

expressed similar sentiments during her interview when she said, "Just because a process

may be unethical or be badly managed doesn't mean we can do without a search process."

While the words conveyed a specific message, the true meaning was to be found in the

earnest tones, the body language, and the unspoken question posed to me during

interviews, "You do understand, don't you?"

Transparency in presidential searches.

Although I came to the understanding that my informants felt that as much

transparency as possible is needed in searches, only one informant, West Consultant,

described her perception of the risk to candidates posed by transparency. She spoke

earnestly of the need to always maintain a sense of the humanity of all individuals

involved. For her, candidates are not a product nor are they an outcome. For her, they are

people who can be harmed by a process that fails to account for their privacy and that

fails to realize that for any given action there may be a consequence, often unintended.

SEARCHES: ORGANIZATIONAL OR SOCIAL PROCESS FOR CONFERRING POWER, OR BOTH

Thus far our examination of the search process suggests that it has all the appearance of being just another organizational process built on functions, albeit one that is commonly accepted and widely used throughout the higher education sector. The process is highly visible yet only the surfaces of activities are apparent with many activities, discussions, and deliberations still remaining behind closed doors. The impression is one of great openness in search processes yet much is still hidden. This paradox simultaneously creates multiple realities depending on the lens of the observer. But discussions and explanations, when offered in antiseptic organizational terms fall short of helping us make sense of this process and its true role and meaning in a higher education organization. Traditional organizational terminology employing words such as process, stakeholder, internal, external, and a plethora of like terms may be very familiar and comforting to classically trained managers or to observers who seek only superficial understanding of the activity. In order to truly make sense of the search process as an integral part of higher education organizational culture and to unlock the power and richness of participant voices it is necessary to examine searches within a social tapestry. Only in this fashion can we hope to capture the sense of community, the intense emotional commitment of participants, the sense of risk on the part of candidates, and the reality of searches as iconic, symbol-laden ceremonies central to sustaining and extending organizational culture in institutions of higher learning. The lens of social anthropology allows me, as a researcher, to look at issues of social relationships, and the manner in

which differing relations between persons and groups, and within groups, influence one another (Gluckman, 2006, p. 31). An examination of the search process as a social or cultural activity results in a critical shift in my perspective of the search activity.

Within the context of this discussion, are members of search committees considered to be stakeholders, defined as having a vested interest in the enterprise? Or, would it be more accurate to suggest that members of a college organizational society view themselves as constituents. That is, as individuals who authorize others to act as their agent? Is the president of the college a duly constituted leader with significant power and authority or is he more akin to the tribal headman who acts as an agent of the society and has only such power and authority as the society, or tribal members, are willing to assign?

If we move away from an examination of presidential searches as organizational process and view searches as significant ritual/ceremony within an organizational society then we can unlock the emotional power of our informants' narratives. We begin to see our informants not as mere participants in a process but as individuals who by virtue of their values, their aspirations, and their experiences give life to the ritual process of choosing a new leader. The black box begins to open and our understanding of the process begins to take form.

PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH: HUNTING FOR A GREAT PRESIDENT OR SOCIALIZATION

As an internal candidate, City College President spoke of her many hours agonizing over the decision to place her name into nomination. She knew of the risk

associated with losing and still working in the college. For her the decision to apply was one of gathering her courage and then working to make herself a viable candidate by practicing a presidential presence. Her story of how she prepared for the interviews reveals a person who realized that she was moving outside her traditional comfort level and, consequently, was very nervous. She said,

> I sat down and wrote down every question I thought the committee might ask and then I wrote down my answers. I stood in front of the mirror practicing my answers and checking out how I looked. I tried on different clothes and worked on my posture. I knew I needed to make an impression and I was nervous.

Rural College President was more sanguine about the process. He recounted how he had been through searches as a candidate and that he had some confidence in his ability to present himself. He took the approach that he would be himself and that the committee could choose him or not. Rural College President said,

> This was not my first search as a candidate. I had a pretty good idea what to expect and I had a good sense of the college as I knew some folks here before I applied. I knew I had to be articulate but I also understood that I had the right credentials so I was a solid candidate. I decided when I went in that I would do the best I could with my replies but that I would focus on simply being me and letting them get a good look. If they decided against me then it wasn't meant to be.

> These stories began to hint for me at a theme that would emerge more fully later.

Specifically, in this case the female candidate was nervous, felt she had to adjust her presentation, and examined herself with a critical eye. Rural College President is a sixty

year old white male and his words suggested that he did not feel the need to make any such adjustments. The stories highlight that each candidate had a clear sense of what presidential presence was required and that this presence was already well defined in a way that made the female candidate feel the need to transform and the male candidate feel able to be himself. Yet even a sitting president was made to feel unsure by the weightiness of this ritualistic process.

Independent College President is a long serving president who has a high level of personal confidence in his current position. He knows his strengths, his limits, and how he relates to people. Yet as he prepared to apply at a new school he became far less sure of himself and how to prepare. He had confidence in his ability to do the job but far less confidence in how to sell himself to the committee. More than once he commented, "I have only done this once in over twenty-five years of working." Although he exuded confidence in public settings, behind the scenes his search preparations betrayed a lack of confidence and continual surprise at the frequent swift, positive feedback from the search committee. Even experienced presidents can become nervous and apprehensive when facing a new search.

City College board members came to the interviews with the greatest sense of purpose and passion. Their reactions, comments, and emotions were remarkably similar. Although our interviews were conducted individually, their comments were very in line with each other and their emotional commitments to the process were similar. For them, the search was a mission to right a wrong, to correct the direction of their college, and to rebuild trust and confidence. The earnestness of their conversations was palpable.

As I listened to City College Board Members and to City College President, my sense of the search was that the process was done with great purpose, with a sense that issues had to be resolved, that people had to be brought back together, and that, above all, the college had to get it right this time. This commitment speaks both to the importance of the process and the personal connection of the participants to their objective of not making another mistake.

One faculty member at Independent College displayed an emotional connection to the process that was unique when compared to anyone else in the process and, at the same time, suggested that the search at their college had been a very different experience from the City College and Rural College searches. When she spoke of the process she smiled, laughed and described how the committee decided to meet off campus for practical reasons. Yet, she said, the process became very personal,

> We decided to use my house because it was brand new and had the room. The meetings actually turned into potluck dinners with everyone bringing something each time we met. It was fun. We got to know each other and had a sense of being responsible for something very, very important. I was really proud to be part of the process and it was even better when it turned out to be great fun. The committee was great. We knew that our assignment was extremely important and we took the challenge very seriously but we managed to truly enjoy the process and each other as we did our work.

At Rural College the process was a different emotional experience for the participants. Rural Staff Member was stressed by being placed in a position of potential

conflict with a longtime friend and colleague who was applying for the position. Yet, as he described, the committee was very professional, included consultation with a former president, and was imbued with a sense that the next president would be confronting very significant challenges and issues. At Rural College there was no sense of social activity associated with the search and no sense of correcting past mistakes. But there was a sense of needing to conduct a thorough, professional search that brought the next best president to the college.

Diversity in the corner office.

As I discussed issues of diversity with my informants, both the mood and tone of the conversations shifted. In prior portions of the conversations we had moved easily back and forth between cordial discussion and strong emotions, particularly when the conversations turned to issues of process legitimacy. When the topic turned to diversity I was figuratively struck in the face with a shift to extremely serious tones, no small amount of resignation in voices and some levels of frustration bordering on anger.

The most significant discussions concerning diversity began to emerge only after the following two conversations. City College President said that not only did she prepare for her interview by researching issues; she consciously changed her outward physical presentation.

Being an internal candidate who was seeking the top job I felt the need to create an image of myself well above my current level. I literally changed my mode of dress, my posture, and the way I chose my words. I tried to be more presidential in their eyes.

Rural College staff flatly stated that it is important for final candidates to "reflect the demographics of the community." During the course of these conversations I found myself thinking about a conversation I had with a Navajo colleague when I worked at another college. We were discussing issues of diversity and equality when he said, "You need to understand that for me, as a Navajo man, 'equality' does not mean being treated as a white man. I want equality of opportunity and treatment but I don't want to have to become a white guy to get it." In this context I began to wonder how much women and ethnic minority candidates for presidencies can be successful if they present their authentic identity and how often successful ones compromise themselves by literally leaving their identities at the interview room door? I formed a new question and presented it to both of the search consultants. Their responses are presented here, unedited and in complete form. They form two of the most powerful commentaries of my research.

The question I posed to each consultant was, "To what degree do you think that people of color and/or women have to withdraw from their personal identities and play a 'mainstream' role in order to be competitive?" East Consultant replied,

Fascinating question – no well formed answer. Where people get caught is between what is expected and what is delivered. Best example, mode of dress. Predominant sartorial style for young African-American candidates...how they show up tags them. Particularly, African-American males find themselves conflicted. Women have the same but adapt easier. A woman who wears red to an interview makes an overt statement. The pressure to find common denominators are extreme particularly for candidates of color. Politics is another

issue. Have to check politics at the door. The hardest part of the diversity

question is not whether it is correct but whether it is just. University of

Confederate States – do you appoint someone who cannot have a chance in the

name of opportunity? You get a lot of self-selection…very few Blacks will apply

for the University of the Confederacy. Anti-Semitism is prevalent. When the

committee says, "We don't want someone from New York," they mean, "No

Jews."

West Consultant replied,

The un-named majority like ethnic minorities who are a different color but talk

and act just like they do – we expect ethnic minorities to be acculturated. If the

recruitment is successful, this is just the FIRST step; ethnic minority candidates

need to feel welcome and supported once they arrive at the new institution. Often,

these candidates are left on their own to find and establish their own support

networks and work relationships. And word spreads like wildfire if an institution

is not welcoming and supportive of minorities, regardless of how intently they

recruit. It isn't just about work either. There needs to be a sense of belonging

personally in the community.

My conversations with both consultants continued. I found it extremely meaningful that

West Consultant had established substantive success in recruiting and placing diverse

candidates. Of her most recent 18 executive level searches in higher education, West

Consultant had placed 4 female, 6 Hispanic, 1 African-American, and 2 Middle Eastern

candidates. In describing her approach she said,

I am personally interested in diversity. To recruit ethnic minority candidates you

have to go where they are and engage them in ways that will tell them the client

welcomes and will support diverse candidates. It is my sense that boards and

trustees inherently want to be open but that they need help and need to be

educated. All too often they simply fall back on what, or who, is comfortable.

My firm works in subtle ways to help promote diversity and to move boards along

the right path.

East Consultant agrees with the statement about board/trustee intent but also notes the

reality of the environment. He said, "They legitimately want diversity in the pool but the

challenge becomes actually taking the step, which they personally perceive to be a risk, to

hire a diverse candidate."

Discussions with my consultant informants suggest that even though diverse

candidates have made progress in attaining presidencies over the past twenty years, the

reality, at least in the world of my informants, is that these gains may have been made at

some cost of personal identity of the candidates who chose, consciously, to adapt to a

more white, male identity. I would certainly regard this finding as a potential topic for

further study. With regards to my current research, this finding suggests that future

search processes, if openly committed to diversity, must include extended discussion and

education of search team members and other participants on issues of diversity, how to be

welcoming across differences, and how identity can impact the ways that candidates

present themselves.

The ideal president.

Demographically, college presidents tend to share a number of common personal and professional characteristics. Across the nation, presidential search processes in higher education follow very familiar, similar steps. Yet, when asked, informants displayed remarkably little agreement as to their preferred characteristics for an ideal president. The disparity in aspirations for presidential skills and abilities becomes even more pronounced when position documents are reviewed.

Agreement, to the extent that it exists, appears to focus on what might best be described as soft skills, or personality-based traits. The most common characteristics preferred by informants and in 40 of 53 (75%) position documents I reviewed is communications. "The president must be a good communicator," was the most prevalent comment I heard from informants. The second most common preferred characteristic, again among informants and contained within the majority of documents, was a collegial or collaborative working style. In this case, the informants and documents used different terms including collegial, collaborative, ability to get along, ability to relate to people, "good mixer", and others. However, the message was clear. The information I gathered suggests that in the two institutions I researched the people who make up these colleges want leaders who are able to work well with others and who can get along with many different types of stakeholders and constituents.

Faculty informants had very distinct ideas of the qualities needed in an ideal president. City College Faculty said,

The president needs to have vision. A major part of this quality includes the

understanding of the culture of our institution and our community. This is very

important because of the uniqueness of our community. An ideal president needs

to connect to all aspects of the school and not just the executive office. In this day

they also need to have fundraising skills. Finally, an ideal president is open,

transparent, and fair.

Independent Faculty Member said,

From my perspective an ideal president has to have personal integrity. That

means he or she shows their true colors all the time, they are not a chameleon.

The president has consistent values and morals and lives to them. An ideal

president is positive in nature and avoids dwelling on the negative. I think I mean

that they have to be realistic and not avoid the truth but they have a game face that

is positive and their behavior is optimistic. The president needs to be

approachable, hard-working, put in the time needed, and be prepared to sacrifice.

Rural College President made a comment that offered some insight into the

priority that stakeholders place on collaborative, low-conflict relations. He said,

You know it is really interesting to me that so many people, particularly trustees,

want a president with vision. But vision is another word for change and change is

disruptive and causes conflict. Above all, trustees don't want conflict or turmoil.

They may say they want vision but in my experience they'll give up vision for

internal peace every time.

Other informants agreed. East Consultant spoke of the need for a president to "have a thick skin" and not react to incessant provocation. Rural College Staff used the term "good mixer" to suggest that the president needs to get along with people in a variety of situations. City College Board Member highlighted her belief that the president must be collaborative and work well with people. City College President believes it is important for a president to be "a real person, engaged, and passionate" when connecting with people. Independent College President put it another way when he said, "A president shouldn't dictate orders more than once to the same person or group and, if he does, the next time better be years later." His point was that a college president maintains his or her effectiveness through positive relations with people and not on authoritarian dynamics.

McClelland (1970) articulately described the challenges of being a college president when he said,

Who in his right mind would want the job of college president under most operating conditions today? A president has great responsibility – for raising money, for setting goals of the institution that faculty, students, and trustees can share, for student discipline, and for appointment of a distinguished faculty. Yet often he has only a very shaky authority with which to execute these responsibilities. The authority which he has he must share with the faculty (many of whom he cannot remove no matter how violently they disagree with the goals set for the university), with the trustees, and with students who speak with one voice one year and quite a different one two years later (p. 44).

This is certainly consistent with the experience of City College when their selection of their new president hinged on a sense that the best candidate could connect with people and serve to heal emotional scars and resolve conflict. As an added pressure, community college trustees, those to whom presidents report, are frequently elected officials for whom conflict and turmoil is to be avoided lest it present them difficult issues in public. In their study of community college trustees, Vaughan and Weisman (1997a) suggested, "Vision, communication, trust, and getting along with all segments of the population are important considerations when describing the ideal president" (p. 144). In this case, vision becomes less an issue of change than in describing a president who understands "where the college is going and how it is going to get there" (p. 140-141). Once we get past the short list of soft-skills, the expectations for an ideal president becomes an almost never-ending wish list including presence, focus, integrity, an educational pedigree, analytical, finance knowledge, knowledge of accreditation issues, knowledge of workforce training, technology, raising funds, enrollment management, and the list goes on. The identification of specific hard skills is contextual depending on the current situation at the individual college. Throughout all interviews and review of documents the only consistent, common traits were communications and collegiality or collaboration.

The Process of Presidential Searches

THE SEARCHES AT CITY COLLEGE AND RURAL COLLEGE

The recent presidential search activities at City College and Rural College were very similar in terms of organization, procedures, and their decision-making processes.

In fact, the search processes at both colleges followed a series of steps that would be very familiar to most observers. Both included appointment of a search committee composed of representatives of internal and external stakeholder groups. In both cases, the committees were appointed by the college boards and had between 12-15 members. The charge to each committee was to direct the search process, develop a candidate profile for screening, and to screen initial candidates in order to develop a short-list of 3-5 finalists. Neither committee had authority to make the final selection or even to suggest the preferred choice. Screening of final candidates and the ultimate selection remained the responsibility of the respective boards. The disconnect between the search committee and the board, as the final authority, is the cause of some of the emotional reactions felt by search committee members.

At both institutions, once constituted, each committee had responsibility for developing a description of candidate qualifications that would be used to solicit applications and as a rubric for screening candidates. In the case of Rural College, the staff representative described the process for developing the candidate profile as, "Collecting everyone's wish list." That is, the final list of qualifications was not negotiated among committee members. Much like a brainstorming process, "Any reasonable suggestion was included without debate or objection." At City College this part of the process was slightly different. According to one City College board member,

> Our committee was responsible for developing the candidate criteria but we made
>
> sure that the Board supported our list. At different times we presented our ideas

to the Board to make sure that board members agreed with our list of

qualifications.

Thus the City College process involved some level of negotiation over the final list of

candidate qualifications. Nevertheless, the City College applicant posting, like most such

postings, listed literally dozens of potential qualifications. The impact of this bed sheet

listing of qualifications is continually felt throughout the process and causes, in my view,

much of the confusion among committee members when they try to construct and apply

candidate screening criteria. Moreover, when a long list of qualifications exists there is

more opportunity for individual committee members and external groups to attach their

own agenda to a particular combination of qualifications. In the words of East

Consultant, "the process can be high jacked by special interests."

Building a diverse pool: Reality or perception?

At this stage in the process both colleges began advertising and collecting

applications. Development of a sizeable pool of qualified candidates is considered to be

one of the most important, and difficult, activities in the search process. All informants

talked about the importance of having a meaningful pool of qualified candidates. East

Consultant and West Consultant each said that one of the prime reasons for colleges to

retain their services was to access their network of candidate contacts. East Consultant

said,

There are two primary reasons we are hired. The main reason is to help enhance

the size of the pool of qualified candidates. The second reason is to catalyze the

process which means making sure that the pool is composed of legitimate

candidates and to keep the process moving forward. What makes a candidate

legitimate is that the candidate has the necessary qualifications, is potentially a

good fit with the needs of the college or university, and is actively in the process

with the intent of accepting the job if offered.

Both search consultants spoke of applicants who are not serious about their candidacy and

who would not accept if offered a position. These candidates, according to the

consultants, pose a serious problem insofar as they take resources and attention away

from legitimate candidates or may, worse, be moved ahead of legitimate candidates in the

process. One City College board member who had participated in four presidential

searches noted that because of the perception that their community is a highly desirable

place to live, the college never has trouble building a pool of qualified candidates. West

Consultant suggested,

Pools tend to be composed of three types of candidates. The first and quickest

applicants to come to the table are what I call 'the usual suspects.' That is, the

candidates who apply over and over. It is pretty interesting that you can just about

predict them by name. The second type is composed of those candidates who

really do not meet the qualifications. These candidates stretch and elaborate in an

attempt to appear qualified. Finally, there is a group of legitimate candidates who

deserve serious consideration. This is the part of the pool that we all try to

expand.

From my perspective, the issue of the size and quality of the candidate pool appeared to

be very important to all participants. A common phrase was, "We all want a number of

good candidates from which to make our choice." Yet, only two informants, the

consultants, spoke openly of actively seeking diverse candidates. While other informants

discussed diversity and suggested their openness to diverse candidates, they failed to

suggest that the process should actively encourage diverse candidacies. Thus, the concept

of expanding the pool of legitimate candidates appears to mean expansion without active

efforts to include diversity unless an ethnic minority happens to apply.

Culling and sorting: The best candidate or the least objectionable?

Once the candidate pool was developed, the search committees at City College

and Rural College began the process of culling down the lists. In both cases, the

committees screened the written applications to sort out those candidates who did not

meet the basic qualifications or did not appear to be candidates for further consideration.

In the case of City College, one board member reported, "We reviewed credentials for

approximately 30 qualified candidates and developed our list of 5 finalists to propose to

the Board." At Rural College the process was similar with the finalist list being

developed without personal contact with individual candidates.

It is worth noting that the mechanics of this particular part of the process varies

with institutions and whether or not consultants are involved with the search.

Independent College President was placed into a list of three finalists with no personal

contact from the institution prior to announcement of the finalists. As with Rural College

and City College, the list of finalists was developed purely by review of documents.

However, in my own experience I was invited to an initial screening interview of semi-

finalists prior to the committee developing the list of finalists. I interviewed, via Polycom

connection, with the entire search committee as did nine other semi-finalists. The final

list of three, of which I was one, came as a result of review of credentials and personal

interviews. Both consultant informants indicated that their services include personal

interview screening of semi-finalists candidates. Results of these interviews then become

part of the criteria used by the search committees to identify a list of finalists.

At Rural College and City College, as also experienced by Independent College

President and in my own experience, the finalists were invited to campus for a series of

interviews and activities including: a formal interview with the search committee, a series

of open meetings with various campus stakeholder groups (faculty, staff, students,

members of the public, etc.), a social activity involving external stakeholders, board

members, and campus leaders, formal interviews with the Board, and final selection by

the Board. Independent College President told of the two day "marathon" where he and

his wife participated in numerous meetings, events, and a Board sponsored social event

where all three final candidates and their families were present. It is interesting to think

of this socialization as perhaps part of the ritual intended to see how candidates stand up

to lengthy tasks and how they handle the social interaction with fellow candidates which

might, in some circumstances, be awkward.

What is interesting to me as a researcher is that the common appearance of the

search process, which helps to create such comfort and inherent legitimacy of the process

in the eyes of observers, masks some very real differences in how colleges approach the

process, in the emotional intensity of stakeholder participants, and in how the existing

organizational culture influences various aspects of the process.

PRIORITIZING QUALIFICATIONS: THE NEED FOR SAFE NEGOTIATIONS

One of the initial responsibilities of a newly appointed search committee is to develop a candidate profile for potential presidential candidates. This profile typically includes a description of the college, in varying levels of detail, and a list of candidate qualifications divided into two categories, preferred and required. McLaughlin and Riesman (1985) spoke specifically to this point when they said,

> The starting point of the search process, then, should be introspection concerning what the institution needs in order to reorganize strengths and to cope with weaknesses, both in terms of history and tradition, and future prospects and dilemmas (p. 344). But in many institutions, no self-analysis exists and the determination of selection criteria – and thus, of institutional direction – is left to the search committee where it becomes a debate over priorities (p. 345).

As became apparent during my conversations with informants, this phase of the process is very inconsistent from institution to institution and can represent a major disconnect between board expectations and search committee management of the process. City College Board members said that the list of candidate qualifications was discussed between the committee and the board but the evidence suggests that the final published list was very similar to lists presented at other colleges. My sense is that these individuals felt there had been some negotiation but when I asked if any particular qualifications were proposed and rejected they could offer no examples. McLaughlin and Riesman (1985) suggested that an outcome of this failure to engage in safe, negotiated conversations early in the process leads to,

In searches of this sort, arguments about institutional direction are made, not

openly at the outset of the search, but buried in the evaluations of final candidates.

One person may be seen as having strong financial skills, another as an academic

leader, and the search committee and board of trustees struggle over which

attributes are more needed at the same time as they consider the candidates'

personalities and backgrounds (p. 345).

They also said, "Still other search committees never determine which criteria are most

important, assuming in the words of one board member, 'We all know what we're

looking for and we'll all know when we've found him'" (p. 345).

The reality is that collegiate Board members, those who are charged with the final

selection of the president, are external to the daily operations of the institution. They

have significant information but it generally comes in the form of reports, and otherwise

filtered communications from staff and faculty. This disconnection is graphically

highlighted in the experience of Independent College President who recently interviewed

for a new presidency. The position announcement included the board goal of "taking the

institution to a position of national prominence" and yet did not set forth any description

of what this phrase included. Independent College President described his experience this

way,

I was very concerned with what the board expected in terms of 'national

prominence' so I asked numerous members of the executive team what they

thought the board was expecting. To my surprise, the executive leaders told me

that they believe that the board has an unrealistic view of the college. In the

words of one, the board members think we are better than we really are.

For Independent College President this disconnect held the potential for creating a very

challenging leadership situation if he took the position. Rural College's president

described it another way. He said,

> Boards and committees are fond of saying that they want a visionary leader,
>
> someone who is a good strategist. But the reality is that if a leader is visionary
>
> then he is an agent of change and change brings conflict. Boards, at their core, do
>
> not want conflict, they want harmony. Thus even though they say they want
>
> vision they are unwilling to accept the turmoil and conflict that inevitably
>
> accompanies creation and implementation of a vision.

In the experiences of these two presidents we can see the challenges that confront this

second stage in the search process.

The experience of the Rural College staff member is common. He said, "Our list

of candidate qualifications was built by including virtually every idea mentioned by

committee members. We did not negotiate inclusion or exclusion or establish any sense

of priority." As previously discussed, the position postings reviewed from other colleges

listed dozens of preferred and required attributes. Yet, according to both board members,

the final choice at City College was based on a perception that the best candidate was one

who could heal the emotional wounds of the college. Both Rural College Staff and the

president agreed that the final selection at their college had hinged on a perception that

the ability to manage institutional finances was the crucial issue that should guide final

selection. Thus, despite extensive lists of qualifications, the final decisions, at least in

these two instances, turned on one issue. It is worth noting that the concept of healing

and bringing people together, the key decision point at City College, did not appear in the

proposed qualifications for the new president. In the case of Rural College the final

turning point for the decision, the ability to manage finances, was but one potential

qualification amongst many others.

City College Faculty said that the faculty body, as a group, had no specific agenda

or defined list of preferences for the new president. At the time of the search, according

to City College Faculty, the reality was that the faculty body was factionalized into two

distinct groups and thus weakened. The divisions were driven by conflicting personalities

and differing views of whether or not the faculty needed to be formally organized into a

representative body. Independent Faculty Member told of various faculty-based issues

that existed at the time of the search but that these issues did not drive any particular

agenda for the search or affect the overall list of qualifications. In the case of the search,

she said that the committee started with a broad list of qualifications without upfront

negotiations over priority. Once candidate applications started to arrive, the committee

created an evaluation rubric and each member was allowed to develop a rating for each

candidate. For her, this became the negotiation of priorities for the new president.

Both search consultants suggested that clarity of expectations with regards to the

skills and experience of candidates is critical to evolving a successful search. East

Consultant said, "The most common reason that searches fail is because constituencies

fail to develop consensus over a realistic set of preferred/required candidate

characteristics." He clarified, "I'm not talking about consensus on the individual

candidate but, rather, consensus on traits and characteristics needed." West Consultant

said that clarity of expectations, and consensus among search participants is important in

evolving a positive search. She detailed the process she uses to help committees,

> We spend a lot of time before the actual search doing a lot of active listening. We
>
> actively interview stakeholder groups and develop a picture of the technical
>
> qualifications, the professional experience, and the personal preferences in terms
>
> of character, etc. We look for the emerging threads of preferences and that, in
>
> essence, forms the core of the search.

At this juncture it is very interesting and informative to highlight analysis of a

number of public search documents. I examined 53 advertisements for community

college presidents that were posted to public websites such as www.chronicle.com and

www.higheredjobs.com, two common job posting sites for higher education. Although

these documents varied in terms of wording and their lists of qualifications some notable

similarities emerged. References to collaborative or collegial demeanor and strong

communication skills appeared in well over 80% of the listings. Other characteristics

were frequently mentioned such as familiarity with technology, financial skills,

fundraising ability, vision, and skills working with external constituencies. But, of

significance to me, these other qualities appeared in fewer than half of the listings and

were inconsistently mentioned. Collaboration and communication overwhelmingly

dominated the listings. I infer from this observation that committees want someone in

whom they see a leader who will bring campus constituencies together and will be

accepted by a broad majority of stakeholders. I find the genesis of an issue imbedded in

this observation that will come up again in the next section of my discussion. Namely,

the inherent nature of the organizational society as defined by its' members preference for

leaders who are acceptable to the broad mass, who are without controversy, and who, in

the words of one informant, "look like themselves."

Another significant issue is that few, if any, of the search committee participants,

including board members, have a true sense of the duties, responsibilities, challenges, and

job requirements of a modern college presidency. Understandably, it is difficult for

people to develop a sense of the presidency when there is only one such position on a

campus. Nevertheless, the challenge remains for search participants to develop some

sense of the position and the critical skills and requirements needed in a new leader. At

Rural College the committee did take specific steps to address this issue by engaging the

consultative services of a prior City College president. This individual was retained to

help develop documents, to guide the search process through critical phases, and to

actually conduct personal interviews and assessment of candidates which became part of

the review material.

BUILDING POOLS: ROUNDING UP MORE THAN THE USUAL SUSPECTS

As I discussed earlier, West Consultant suggested that there are three broad types

of candidates in a typical candidate pool. Specifically, he said that there is a group of

usual suspects who apply for virtually every opening, a group of candidates who don't

quite measure up yet try to stretch their qualifications – in essence, a set of shoppers who

are not likely to be serious candidates – and a group of legitimate candidates. Legitimate,

in this case, suggesting that the candidates are qualified and would accept the position if

offered. Boards and search committees are, obviously, highly interested in this third

group. Out of pure self-interest and in hopes of finding the next, best president,

committees work hard to build as large a pool of legitimate candidates as possible. In

fact, both consultants agreed that a primary reason for their employment by colleges is to

help build the candidate pool. East Consultant said, "The primary reason we get hired is

for our contacts and ability to build a viable candidate pool. We bring a database of

connections and candidates to the search." From my perspective, this aspect of the

process is interesting insofar as it has the potential to contribute to the further

homogenization of candidates given the desire of consultants to bring candidates to the

pool that they believe will be acceptable. On the other hand there is the commitment of

West Consultant to promotion of diversity. She reports,

> We proactively make choices in our search processes to include diverse
>
> candidates who also exceed minimums. We talk to boards and search committees
>
> about the importance of a diverse employee population that reflects the
>
> communities they serve and the students they teach. Beyond that, we have no
>
> control. All we can do is make recommendations and search committees and
>
> boards do what they are going to do.

During the course of my interviews, three informants (both City College board members

and Independent College President) spoke of a search consultant not part of this study

whom they perceived to be guilty of pool stacking. That is, the consultant actively sought

to build the size of the candidate pools without specific regard as to whether or not the

candidates would be viable. I was unable to confirm their statements through other

sources yet their comments are worth inclusion here insofar as they do represent a reality

as perceived by at least these particular individuals.

It is important to describe, in organizational terms, some of the issues facing

colleges and college leadership as they move into periods of leadership transition.

Colleges confront a number of issues when attempting to attract the best candidates.

West Consultant suggested that the pool size and quality is directly affected by the

reputation of the hiring institution and the level of compensation offered. Additional

factors that appear to affect the pool size and structure are the attractiveness of the college

location in terms of life style, financial strength of the institution, and internal

organizational issues such as the presence or absence of organized labor units on campus.

City College board members reported that City College has little trouble in attracting

legitimate candidates largely because of their region, the quality of the school, and an

attractive compensation package. Similarly, Rural College President reported that the

search he participated in had over 20 qualified candidates again due to a reasonable living

area and realistic compensation. On the other hand, Independent College President

suggests that his own college will have difficulty in attracting a strong pool because of the

low compensation package currently in place. Consequently, he is working with the

board to prepare them for the inevitable change in their relationship to the presidency

when a new person takes office. But, as he recounts, this effort involves far more than

simple organizational changes.

My board members are having trouble understanding not only how things have to change but why. I have been spending significant time talking with them individually trying to help them come to grips with the inevitability of my departure and with the need for them to change how they relate to the presidency. I am asking them to make changes for the next president that they would prefer to make for me. It is a difficult conversation. They see me happy and wonder why they have to change for the next person. I have been surprised at the emotional nature of the conversations and the difficulty of helping them develop a realistic sense of how the institution needs to change. I am the only president these folks have known during their entire time on the board. I have to realize that the change in leadership is not only emotional for me; it is for them as well.

East consultant described the development of a competitive pool of candidates this way,

Actually, this is a great question. When we get marching orders from a board to bring in a competitive pool, it is generally code for the fact that they want more than one legitimate candidate from which to choose, with more being better than fewer. In every case, they want people who can do the job as it is described – both the various duties and responsibilities enumerated in the job description and challenges and opportunities facing the institution and the president for the foreseeable future. I would posit that most of our clients have given very little thought to whether that definition would result in a homogeneous or a heterogeneous candidate pool in terms of skills and abilities. We almost inevitably end up explaining to our clients that there are many ways to skin a cat

and many types of leaders who can succeed in a given institution, none of whom

will be perfect. Personally, I think that the most robust pools are the ones that

present many different options in terms of the skill, abilities, and approaches of

various highly-qualified candidates.   It is very difficult to predict with any degree

of certainty what sort of leader will be most successful for an institution as

complex and political as a university.   My experience is that search committees

benefit from seeing several different options and choosing the optimal.

East Consultant's comments describe the organizational reality of the process while

Independent College President's comments reveal the emotional responses of board

members.

During my review of position documents, I noted that only 8 out of 53 postings

(15%) required a doctorate or terminal degree as a qualification for employment as

president. Yet, fully 80% of community college presidents in 2006 had terminal degrees

(*The American College President*, p. 90). I asked the search consultants about why there

is such a difference between posting qualifications and final hires. West Consultant

replied,

The purpose of stating minimum qualifications is just that – they are minimums

which, if not met, remove someone immediately from consideration. In our

experience all colleges and universities recruit to preferred or desired

qualifications. However, a minimum leaves the door open for that exceptional

candidate, who is in the process of completing a doctorate, or who is a sitting

CEO without a doctorate but has an outstanding track record of experience.

East Consultant had similar views although with some interesting twists,

> I actually think that there is a simple answer to your question. Job specs are written by search committees and those committees are dominated by trustees. Trustees always think that any leader with business sense can run an institution of higher education, so they always prevail upon the rest of the committee to keep the specs as open and as accessible as possible. Remember, legally you can hire a PhD without requiring one, but you can't not hire a PhD if you do require one. That will get you sued, and you will lose. Specs are one thing, but the actual hiring is done as a result of a much wider array of input that is dominated by campus groups, and campus groups are dominated by faculty. Faculty always want one of their own. They prefer a member of the professoriate, of course, but if they can't get that they sure as heck want someone who has gone through the same hazing ritual as they have to be admitted to the academy. You are going through that hazing ritual right now; we call it earning a doctorate. When even the most powerful group of trustees is confronted by the voice of the faculty clamoring for one of their own, it is very, very difficult to turn a deaf ear. It is sensible, of course, to leave the field more widely open at the outset of a search than you intend it to be at the end, but some of this is disingenuous in the extreme.

Rural College President and Rural College staff both commented on the perceived importance of academic credentials. Rural College President said, "Presidents should have a doctorate and if not they must have impressive, recognizable skills." Rural College staff said that a "strong educational pedigree" is important insofar as it helps establish the

legitimacy of the president with both internal and external groups. Independent College

President candidly stated, "The doctorate is the union card we all need for admission to

the presidency. It suggests that we have paid some dues but it really has nothing to do

with whether or not we can do the job." One of my colleagues, who has experience as a

college president, suggested,

> An academic organization is quite strikingly different to lead than another kind of
>
> organization and the greatest difference is the faculty. They not only have higher
>
> levels of education than most employees in other organizations but they also have
>
> to be trusted to do most of their work without direct supervision. This autonomy
>
> and entitlement by degree creates an incredibly complex dynamic in colleges and
>
> universities. So having that Ph.D. and having been a faculty member at some
>
> point really do help a president function effectively. Some folks do have
>
> leadership styles that work well with faculty even if they haven't been faculty.
>
> Usually [they] are leaders who encourage autonomy, widespread decision making
>
> and respect others abilities.

Rural College president agreed when he described his perception of the professional and

personal qualities of an exceptional president. He said, "The president needs to have a

doctorate. If not, he must have unquestioned, impressive skills that are clearly

recognizable and accepted by the constituencies." It is interesting to note that even during

this interview the inevitable gender reference assumed the president to be male.

The issue of internal candidates is even more interesting. Conceptually, it would

seem logical that internal candidates can and should be an important part of the candidate

pool. Yet, here is another example of how institutions in higher education behave more akin to tribal societies than as organizations built along function lines to serve a specific purpose. Internal candidates do not fare well in the selection process and they often suffer significant negative impact to their ability to function effectively in their organization if they fail to gain the top spot. West Consultant speaks to the issues associated with internal candidacies when she describes this part of the search as "drama and politics." She said, "Internal candidates create a great deal of internal turmoil. Nevertheless, I believe that it is important for an organization to say, 'we give serious consideration to internal candidates.'" City College President was an internal candidate and she clearly felt the pressure and turmoil caused by her application. She said, "I knew, win or lose, that my application would cause turmoil and force people to take sides. I thought long and hard before I applied because I knew the risk of failing and having to return to work among people who would view me as a loser and for a new president who would wonder if I posed a threat to their success." As I previously recounted, Rural College staff felt their own concern about being perceived as the one who blocked an internal candidate.

The failure of internal candidates to appear in the process or to secure the final appointment runs counter to principles of organizational success identified by Collins (2009). Collins suggests, "…in our previous research, over 90% of the CEOs that led companies from good to great came from inside; meanwhile, over two-thirds of the comparison companies in that study hired a CEO from outside and yet failed to make a comparable leap" (p. 95). Nevertheless, colleges consistently hire new presidents from

outside their organization. In 2006, 64% of community college presidents assumed their

presidency from a position outside the institution (*The American College President*, 2007,

p. 87). East Consultant goes so far as to suggest that, "Trustees often prefer an outside

candidate because it is the one way they can express their own desires to see the

organization change." From my perspective there is a critical difference in the process of

choosing new CEOs within non-education organizations and in choosing new CEO's in

higher education. In higher education it is expected that candidates actively declare

themselves and file formal applications for positions. In higher education, promotions are

sought, they are rarely offered. This process of self-declaration intensifies the sense of

winning and losing. Further, it presents a clear risk to incumbents of changing the nature

of their relationship with existing colleagues.

As with the discussion surrounding process integrity, I found myself listening to

very passionate, emotional statements when the topic of candidate pools touched on

issues associated with internal candidates. But I was not prepared for the intensity of

conversations, and the subtle suggestions, I encountered when the discussion turned to the

diversity of candidates.

SOLID EXAM: PART RITUAL, PART SOLID HOMEWORK

When it comes to actual screening of candidates, searches routinely incorporate

some common steps including sorting of applications, preliminary interviews with semi-

finalists, and finalist interviews on campus. On-campus activities routinely include a

session with the search committee, some form of public discussions with stakeholder

groups, possibly a social event, and formal interviews with trustees. One of the less

visible activities involves checking of candidate references and doing meaningful

background checks. In the experience of several of my informants this is where a search

process can easily fail.

City College Board Member indicated that in past searches at their campus final

candidates came to the table without comprehensive vetting of their references or

background. In one historical case, the City College Board Member noted, "We actually

chose a president who left his prior institution while engaged in a very public lawsuit the

nature of which might have caused us to question his leadership skills. The trouble is that

we didn't know about the lawsuit. At the time we used a professional search firm who I

think should have caught the problem. They didn't and we certainly did not use that firm

in subsequent searches." West Consultant said that a big part of her responsibility is to

conduct a thorough review of candidates going beyond a formal list of references.

"Although," she noted, "You can learn a lot by talking to references who are expected to

be the candidate's friends. I find if you keep your mouth closed people will tell you the

most amazing things."

All three presidents in this study reported that their actual on-campus interviews

followed the scenario outlined earlier.

What appears apparent to me is that the entire process, up to this point, has

resulted in development of a set of finalist candidates all of whom look remarkably alike

in terms of their professional background, their education, and their aspirations and

values if not their ethnicity. How then do the trustees choose from among the finalists?

What qualities or characteristics make one candidate rise above another? The answer emerges from the collective voices of my informants.

Fit: The Holy Grail of Presidential Searches

When Organizational Culture and Process Meet

In the final analysis, all informants agree that the ultimate choice is determined subjectively on how well the candidate fits with the institution. And since the institution itself is an inanimate body, the final choice is made by individual trustees who each bring a set of values, aspirations, and prejudices to the table. Fit is a word almost universally applied by informants as a description of the turning point in a decision to hire, or not, a particular candidate. Yet in a review of 53 sets of search documents the word "fit" never appears, even once.

Rural College President said, "I believe the turning point for me came when the trustees decided that I fit better with their perception that the next president had to be a strong financial manager." Yet, although finance was mentioned in the position announcement for Rural College it was hardly a priority item.

City College Board Member said, "I think we made our final decision based on who we felt best fit our need for a healer." Again, the search documents made no reference to this, or associated concepts.

Rural College Staff said, "Every college has a personality or culture. We wanted a strong financial manager but in the final analysis the candidate had to fit with who we are."

City College President and Rural College Staff agreed that fit is a flexible concept that depends on the assessment of the organization at the time. Fitness may involve personality, ethnicity, other qualifiers, or an ill-defined combination of several qualities. Moreover, very often fit is in the eye of the beholder and a group of trustees may each bring a different perception to the final decision. Paraphrasing Justice Potter Stewart from *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964) when commenting on issues of pornography, he once observed that he may not know how to describe it but he would know it when he saw it. Much the same appears to be true with the issue of fit between an institution and the final candidate.

How does one define the term fit? Fit, based on comments from search participants, does not have a single definition, it changes even at a given institution depending on circumstances, and, interestingly, it can apply to both sides of the candidate process. Independent College President recounted the story of his recent interviews and resulting offer at a western community college.

> When my wife and I traveled to the interviews I was convinced that this might be
> the opportunity I have been thinking about for a long time. Honestly, from the
> first minutes when we drove on campus I was uneasy. Even before the interviews
> I felt that we might be in the wrong place. But I went into the interviews
> convinced to give it my best effort. I had a great set of interviews and was able to
> spend some really quality time with members of the executive team. I thought
> they were good folks and that I would be able to work well with them. They were
> very open and honest about their views and one told me that he thought the Board

members had a possibly overly high estimate of the quality of the college.

Nevertheless, their insights really gave me a feel for the college and its

opportunities and challenges. I really started to come to my decision on the way

back from the interview. I can't really describe it other than to say that the

opportunity did not feel right for me. At that point I did not know their decision

but I determined to call them when I returned and pull out from the search.

Basically, I understood that I was a good fit for them but they did not fit with me.

In this case he was describing how the existing challenges at the college did not fit with

his own desires for new professional challenges. Later he described to me his view of

how he defined the lack of fit between himself and the institution.

I'm not sure I was entirely clear on my own objectives until going through this

process. In retrospect, I realize that I want to move to an institution that is equal

to, or better than where I am at now. At this stage in my career I want to take an

organization to the next level of excellence and performance. I spent the first

years of my presidency fixing things, buildings, policies, and personnel. What I

felt from the first minutes driving on to the new campus was that I would be

stepping back in my career to a time when I was a fixer versus being a builder. I

may have been what they wanted but they didn't fit for me.

Thus, the issue of fit is not just determined by the needs and circumstances of the

institution. Moreover, it defies a specific definition. Here is an excellent example of how

the collective stories of informants combine to create a deeper understanding of this

critical concept. Fit, in their collective voices, becomes a concept defined by the context

of the time, the institutional circumstances, and the personalities involved. Independent Faculty said, "Fit is instinctive. In our case I think the committee was of one mind as to what we were seeking in a candidate. We didn't formally define fit but we didn't argue about it either." Rural College Staff said, "The definition of fit shifts with context. Every institution has a personality and a candidate has to be able to fit. A good fit in one place might not work in another." City College President said, "Fit is intangible, flexible. It depends. Fit might be determined by skills, personality, or even ethnicity." West Consultant said, "The final turning point in a search decision is the fit of the candidate with the committee's perceptions of their needs and desires."

How then do trustees choose among candidates who have been screened using a bed sheet list of qualifications and who, once brought to the campus, tend to resemble one another to a surprising degree? Traditional screening has a propensity to push candidacies to the lowest common denominator of qualifications. Yet, according to East Consultant, "The search process, despite some flaws is reasonably strong and works surprisingly well. In my opinion the process works best when committees come to understand what they are doing. In effect, as they become more skilled they raise their expectations, the common denominator moves up. The expectations are forced north by having people involved in the search process come to understand and respect each other's views." I found, during the course of my interviews, that this is an accurate representation of the reality experienced at City College and Rural College. Despite the apparent lack of early negotiations and the all inclusive nature of the committees, it appears from my conversations that as their respective searches progressed there began to emerge a

consensus of the priorities for the next president. City College board members both said

that they felt an emerging sense of the need for the next president to be a healing force for

the college. One said, "As our meetings and discussions continued, we all began to

believe that a critical role for the next president would be to bring us back together."

Rural College Staff said that there was an unspoken concern over future finances and that,

as the search progressed, this concern gathered voices from within the committee.

Eventually, he reported, the issue became the driving qualification for the final selection.

In both cases, Rural College and City College, the informants were unable to describe

early agreement on qualifications and criteria yet, as their processes moved forward,

members found common ground, negotiated key priorities, subordinated special interests,

and came together for a final choice. Although there is no formal mechanism for

evaluating presidents I can report on a personal conversation I had with a prior state

higher education leader. I had asked, "Which presidents in the state are most highly

regarded and in whom do you have the highest confidence?" He gave me three names

which included City College President, Rural College President, and Independent College

President. He said, "We have a wide range of qualified folks in the state but I would tell

you that my experience working with these three suggests that they are in a league of their

own." Perhaps the search process, as East Consultant suggests, is not an organizational

process as much as it is a journey during which committee members who learn about each

other, their values, their priorities, and their aspirations. Rather than negotiate a

commonality at the beginning of the process they allow the process itself help to bring

them together, to gain common ground, and to develop an informally negotiated

perspective of what is best for themselves and the institution they serve.

According to the informants, fit is the ultimate determinant driving the choice of a

new leader. Listening to their words, I perceive fit to me a moving target depending on

circumstances and context. Moreover, the informants used emotional terms such as

instinctive, feeling, perception to describe their sense of fit. In the final analysis, in the

case of Rural College and City College, the search criteria did not drive the closing

decision. Perception by search committee members that the candidates fit with their

perceived needs was the final determinant. Yet as I listen to these stories and

explanations I find myself thinking that the search committee members are making the

judgment of fit after having personally interviewed a small fraction of the total applicants.

Five finalists made it to the interview stage at both colleges. In the case of Independent

College President's search only three candidates went to the interviews. If fit is

intangible and is identified after meeting candidates then it would seem that the paper-

screening of the majority of candidates risks excluding some who might, in fact, be an

excellent fit for the institution. In essence, it appears that the final decision about fit is

not that the institution found the best candidate who fit with their needs. Rather, the

institution found the best fit from among a final short list of candidates. I find myself

wondering if the paper-screening contributes to the homogenization of the final short list

and the inability of the committee to connect with candidates on a personal level misses

some important opportunities for candidates who might have less than traditional resumes

or who might be more diverse than traditional candidates?

NOT SO SUBTLE PRESSURE TOWARDS HOMOGENEITY

Is it little wonder that personality-based skills, the ability to get along with people and build a conflict-free environment dominate the priority list for presidential characteristics? The need for specific hard skills vary from college to college depending on current institutional needs but the desire for someone who is respected, collegial, and dare I suggest, likeable is dominant. Whether the consequence is intended or not, the outcome of this priority has a very dramatic effect on the outcome of searches and may go far in helping us to understand why presidents are so similar in terms of soft-skills, professional background, and ethnic and gender characteristics. As suggested by the informants and the literature; we want people who are like us; we want people who get along; we do not want controversial figures; and, members of the college community want to like the president as a person. The end result is a subtle, yet forceful pressure towards a common denominator of positive soft-skill personal characteristics and away from anything that tend to mark a candidate as a different and thus suspect in terms of being a potential source of division. East Consultant describes the final selection as being a process of "looking for the negative." That is, trustees look at the finalists and identify the characteristics or issues that are negative and thus support removing the person from consideration. In many instances, the final candidate is not so much a positive choice as he or she is the last, least controversial figure still standing. Another way of looking at this issue might be that rather than the least controversial figure still standing, the last one standing may be the person who creates the least discomfort among those responsible for making the selection.

Summary

Although the findings of this study are based on a limited number of interviews across a limited number of venues, I believe that the voices of the informants and the document research has revealed some very clear themes and helped to bring light into the interior of the black box. Care has been taken to bring a range of views and experiences forth in the form of voices from within the search process. These voices, although limited in number, represented a significant number of searches. Of the three presidents who participated they have been involved as candidates in a total of six separate presidential searches. Of the three trustees, their total number of presidential searches is eight. West Consultant has been directly engaged in over thirty successful searches while East Consultant has been engaged in over two hundred presidential searches. To a person, informants were forthcoming and candid about both their experiences and their emotions. Although I listened carefully to their words and tried to gauge their feelings, I had no true sense of the impact of their stories until I began to put their words together as I tried to make sense of the search process through their respective lenses.

The sense I have is that institutions of higher education, at least from the perspective of participants, display many characteristics and values often associated with tribal societies. Within this context, the presidential search process has become an iconic ceremony responsible not only for selection of the next leader but for establishing the legitimacy of the new leader in the eyes of the constituent members of the institution. Regardless of the issues associated with the process it is expected to be central to selection of a new president lest members of the institution feel disenfranchised not only

from their right to convey power but to remove it from a leader who violates their principles or loses their trust.

The symbolic importance of the search as a central ritual or ceremony in higher education culture is significant. Yet, if not carefully managed, the activity itself is fragile at key points in the process and susceptible to corruption or issues of legitimacy.

Through the course of my research I found that informants had a strong desire to give voice to their experience as participants in the search process. The individual voices gave me a sense of the search process, its parts, how it operated, and how some parts of the process create operational issues that affect, sometimes negatively, the outcome. However, when the voices came together I began to perceive the search process not as a linear series of events and antiseptic organizational activity but rather as a holistic event. The collective stories and emotional connections of the participants portrayed the search process as a complex series of interactions, human negotiation, individual sense making, and intense reactions ranging from abject pride to latent fear. The process has become a central ceremony that is, in itself, an important cultural activity in higher education, most certainly at the institutions involved in this study. Individually the voices expressed support for the diversity of candidates yet when their stories were brought together a different perception of reality emerged. Although ethnic minority candidates and women, in particular, have made strides in gaining the executive office their success masks an insidious reality experienced by many diverse candidates who in order to succeed often have to leave their true selves in the doorway of the interview room in order to become someone who is more acceptable to the committee.

In retrospect, my choice of an ethnographic study has allowed me to develop the voices, stories, and emotions of the participants. Individually, participants described an organizational process. Collectively, their voices created a fabric that revealed intricate connections, emotional colors, presence of a cultural ritual central to the identity of their institutions, and a sense that participation in this symbolic, visible, important process generated visceral emotional responses ranging from frustration, fear, anger, pride, sense of duty, accomplishment, to "the best experience of my professional career" in the words of Independent Faculty.

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CHAPTER V

The Next Best Search

Chapter V

The Next Best Search

I began this work with a question, "Who will lead America's community colleges over the next five, ten, and twenty years?" As I have discussed, for the vast majority of U.S. institutions of higher education the answer to this question is rooted in the activities of presidential search committees. The search committee process, since its broad adoption in the early 1950's, has evolved into an accepted and expected method by which campus constituencies participate in the process of conferring power and authority on a new leader. The process has gained such wide legitimacy that it has taken on a symbolic role of iconic proportions within higher education when college presidencies change hands. How then does the search process contribute to successful selection of the next best president on campus?

In order to learn more about presidential searches and how the search processes are perceived by participants and observers I developed a study based on two research questions.

1. What experiences, underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs do search process participants bring to the search activity and how do participants negotiate their position and role in the process in relation to other participants?

2. To what extent does the process of negotiating relationships and priorities by participants affect the overall search activity?

My research, a critical ethnographic study, engaged informants across a wide range of

campus roles including presidents, trustees, staff, and faculty. Student members were not

included because, in most cases, the students who participated have long since left their

respective campuses and connection with them would have been problematic at best. As

I previously discussed, to date there has been very little, if any, research concerning how

participants make sense of their roles on the committees and how search committees go

about their work. Friedman and Olk (1995) used the term "black box" to describe their

view that the search process has remained virtually unexamined in the ensuing years since

1985 except for assessment of contextual conditions and associated outcomes (p. 160).

By listening to voices from within the search process I have tried to develop some sense

of the nature of the organizational and social issues confronting participants as they took

part in the search process. Particularly with regards to the social issues I have attempted

to evaluate using a critical lens. Beyond serving an organizational purpose, the search

process is part of our social fabric the outcomes of which serve as evidence of the

progress, or lack of, on the part of our society to create equal opportunities and growth of

economic circumstances for our entire population.

Broadly speaking, what I found was that the search process is widely accepted,

necessary in order to establish legitimacy of the presidential selection, varies little in

terms of specific steps, has some inherent flaws, is potentially susceptible to undue

influence by individual or group interest, and, in the view of most observers, works

surprisingly well in its assigned task. I also found that the process, despite public words

to the contrary does not yet serve as an open doorway for all candidates. Diverse

candidates, specifically ethnic minorities and women still are confronted with obstacles,

some of which are unintended and others the result of deliberate inaction by those

responsible for managing and leading the process. Based on my research, I have

identified three categories of analysis: issues of process, issues confronting candidates,

and implications for future research.

From an ethnographic perspective I found that the individuals who comprise the

search process do, in fact, come to the activity with deeply ingrained sets of values,

experiences, and views of the future that may vary widely from those of their colleagues.

The process of building a committee with representatives from key campus constituencies

not only brings together varied special interest, it brings together people who have high

emotional commitment to their view of searches as an important ritual within their

institution. Moreover, each person comes to the process with varied emotional reactions

ranging from pride to resignation, confidence to fear, and in some cases anger and

frustration related to outcomes of prior searches. I was surprised at both the range of

emotions and the intensity of participant's feelings. Through their words and stories I

developed a clear image of presidential searches as a ceremony that is so much part of

their culture that they cannot envision changing leaders in any other way.   When viewed

through the eyes of the participants, as described in their words, I saw an activity that may

have begun many decades ago as an organizational process but has evolved over time into

a ceremonial activity that is at the center of how a college society and its' members

confers meaning and legitimacy on a new leader.

STRONG VOICES AND CENTRAL MESSAGES

Participants in this study offered insightful and thought provoking insights as they told their stories. Although the range of their comments was significant and covered a wide variety of activities, each informant group offered key messages that are individually interesting and collectively provocative. From my perspective, the collection of these key messages suggests that the process is, indeed, flawed and in need of substantive adjustment if we are to create a safe environment for all candidates most especially those of diverse backgrounds.

Central Messages and Themes:	
Presidents	*Boards call for vision and change yet these concepts conflict with their ultimate objective of internal harmony.*
Consultants	*Transparency is dangerous and comes with very real risk and harmful costs in human terms.*
Board Members	*The process is fragile and subject to corruption by individual agendas and poor implementation.*
Faculty	*We must participate in and have trust in the process. The process must be open and transparent.*
Staff	*Internal candidates pose a very real risk to our working relationships and friendships. In the final analysis, people in the process prefer people who look like themselves.*

Figure 2. Central Messages from Informant Groups

Shining Light into Dark Corners of the Box

The information emerging from this research could not have been developed without using a critical ethnographic lens. As a purely organizational analysis the study would provided a broad description of the search process, the steps involved, and report

on the outcomes. Viewing the study through purely an organizational lens would have

revealed the dimensions of the black box yet the box would have remained unopened.

However, by adapting the discipline and perspectives of critical ethnography to the study

I have been able to peer into the black box and develop a deeper understanding of how

the search process fits into the culture of two community colleges and the underlying

values, assumptions, and beliefs of those directly involved in presidential search

processes. While looking through the ethnographic lens I did not cast aside the

organizational lens. By keeping both perspectives I have been better able to develop the

critical aspect of this research. That is, the effort to better understand the issues and

opportunities presented in the search process.

Through the lens of social anthropology, the process of presidential selection at

these colleges begins to resemble more of a tribal process of selecting a new headman.

Within this cultural framework, members of the society meet together to identify the next

headman, confer defined power and authority and yet retain a measure of privilege to

withdraw their support at a future point in time (Gluckman, p. 125-126). In higher

education the process of withdrawing support has been institutionalized in the form of

non-confidence votes wherein members of the institution band together to formally cast

ballots of support or no-confidence in the current leader.

My own introduction to the concept of a college as a society of scholars as

opposed to operating as a traditional enterprise built on function lines came early in my

first fulltime executive position at a comprehensive community college. During a

conversation with a colleague I made the comment, "We need to follow her direction

since she is the boss." It is important to understand that I had just come from a for-profit

environment and was most familiar with traditional authoritarian roles in an organization.

My colleague, a faculty leader, replied in a not entirely friendly tone,

> She is not my boss. You need to understand how we work in higher education.
>
> You don't appreciate the fact that in higher education we are all colleagues and do
>
> not operate with these artificial structures or in an authoritarian environment. We
>
> simply don't submit ourselves to that kind of hierarchy.

My colleague's comments were totally consistent with the notion that power and

authority in higher education is limited. It is important to acknowledge that even if power

and authority are limited or highly structured in higher education they are not absent. One

of the challenges confronting any executive leader, especially presidents, in higher

education is to develop a nearly immediate understanding of their institution, the existing

power structure, the hidden power relationships, and the every-present landmines, issues

that are hidden from view but set to become major problems when uncovered or

inadvertently ignored. Moreover, power and authority in higher education is conferred in

ritualistic manner carrying strong, implicit inference that it can be withdrawn, if only

through symbolic actions such as votes of no confidence. The tribal similarity is found

in Gluckman's observation that tribal members highly value their privilege of ostracizing

their headman (p. 126).

My title for chapter one was, "Who will lead?" Recent articles in The Chronicle

of Higher Education raise similar questions and suggest that the traditional stepping stone

position to the presidency, the chief academic officer, may no longer be the source of the

majority of new presidents. Ekman (2010) began his article by stating,

> College leadership is nearing a tipping point. Recent reports by the Council of
>
> Independent Colleges and the American Council on Education indicate that fewer
>
> chief academic officers – the traditional pool of future college presidents – are
>
> now willing to be candidates for presidencies than in the past.

Ekman mentioned that sunshine laws discourage candidates yet it is the ever-increasing

external orientation of presidential duties along with pressure by boards and legislatures

to adopt more business oriented operating models that is discouraging chief academic

officers to be interested in taking the next step. Nevertheless, the need for new presidents

is increasing as described by Schmidt (2009) who identified the large number of

presidents reaching retirement age as a primary reason for the increase.

I believe that this shift may well create the potential for alteration in the activity of

searches, the orientation of search committees to presidential qualifications, and an

opportunity for diverse candidates. The traditional move of chief academic officers into

the community college presidential role served, in many cases, to perpetuate the lack of

diversity in the corner office insofar given that 86.2% of chief academic officers in

community colleges in 2008 were white (*The American College President*, 2008, p.93).

With fewer of these individuals willing to move up the boards and committees will have

to broaden their perspective and this creates an opportunity for diverse candidates to

increase their presence in the search process and, ultimately, the corner office. Although

the sheer number of openings may create increased opportunity for diverse candidates, it

appears obvious from this research that individual and institutional attitudes must continue to change if diverse candidates are to have hope of achieving significantly increased representation in presidential offices. Safe dialogue, legitimate negotiation of expectations, conscious awareness of the issues, and willingness to embrace difference as a positive influence will be required before diverse candidates will be able to authentically represent themselves in many search processes.

My research suggests that the search process itself, while perceived by many to be critical to identifying a new leader through legitimate means, is susceptible to flaws and, in some cases, to deliberate corruption by participants with narrow or personal agendas. Flaws that appear inherent in the process include disconnects between expectations of boards responsible for final selection and committees responsible for gathering and screening candidates. These flaws, and others, appear more organizational in nature and may well be resolved using traditional organizational processes and tools. However, the issues of narrow agenda, high-jacking of the process, pressure to look past diverse candidates, and other challenges driven by personality, values, and organizational culture are more vexing. These issues emerge more fully into the light as a result of the ethnographic lens of my research. Awareness of the issues, safe discussions, and conscious effort to understand how and why they exist are beginning points for further research into potential resolutions. By giving voice to their experiences, search participants in this study are helping to bring openness and transparency to more of the search process.

My sense from the discussions related to candidate qualifications and expectations is that this aspect of the search process lacks a consistent rigor, suffers from unwillingness on the part of participants to truly discuss and negotiate their desires and aspirations for a new leader, and has the potential to undermine the effectiveness of the process. This is not, from my perspective an issue of process integrity as much as it is one related to the ability, or inability, of committee members to develop common connections and negotiate their views and values into a commonly accepted rubric of qualifications. As members of a society versus perceiving themselves as organizational functionaries, the committee participants display a marked tendency to act inclusively and not take actions that risk alienating members of their social group. My sense from listening to the stories of my informants is that recognition of the importance of negotiating expectations and building consensus around a narrow list of candidate qualifications may help a committee become more cohesive early in the process and, consequently, support identification of a stronger pool of finalists for board consideration. Yet, when is consensus something that has evolved from open, constructive debate and when is it something emerging from a group-think type of process? My perception is that the key to developing true consensus is for the committee participants to create a safe environment wherein they can openly discuss issues, campus needs, potential for the future development of the institution, and other value-driven ideas without fear of criticism or having their conversations aired publicly out-of-context. Rath and Conchie (2008) suggested that organizations are swift to list communications, vision, and the ability to carry through and complete activities as high priorities for new leaders. They

noted that all these characteristics are desirable and in my review of search documents I

found these three skills present in 100% of the lists. Yet, Rath and Conchie noted that

research by the Gallup organization has determined that while these characteristics may

be desired in a new leader that few, if any leaders, have truly high order skills in multiple

categories (p. 7). Search documents rarely list a few desired characteristics. My review

of documents suggests that the most common lists ask for skills in over twenty discrete

areas. While group think is to be avoided, it seems clear that some discussions leading to

a consensus on priorities would be a positive step in the search process. This consensus

requires negotiation and compromise which has the effect of placing individual members,

chosen as representatives of groups, in difficult positions having to negotiate on behalf of

external participants who may or may not support the final choices. Thus, as appears the

case in the searches I have examined, the tendency is for the committee to avoid the

difficult decisions associated with negotiations and to, ultimately, begin the final choice

by eliminating individual candidates based on perceptions of singular faults. This is the

part of the process that leads, in my view, to the sense that the opening of a search is a

casting of a broad net to capture as many candidates as possible. As the committee has to

narrow the field, the process is based on individual evaluation for candidate flaws.

Again, this process creates an environment that avoids much of the tough negotiations

and gives, in essence, individual members a veto power over candidates. As noted

earlier, this process may have negative consequences for candidates who are ethnic

minorities and/or women.

Through the course of my research I began to perceive a pattern of how search processes gather candidates and, ultimately, make a final selection. This pattern appears very different depending upon whether it is viewed through an organizational lens or from an ethnographic perspective. It is through an ethnographic lens that I began to recognize a pattern of search and selection that is, in practice, far different from how the process is described by individual participants, observers, and in search documents. From an organizational perspective the process is intended to develop a pool of qualified candidates and choose the best individual from among the group. However, as the voices and stories come together in my study I perceived that the process is different from what is portrayed in the organizational view. The reality of the search process is described more accurately by dividing it into two phases. In the first phase the committee casts a wide net to collect candidates that meet a broad, general set of criteria. In essence the process is screening candidates for admission to the pool. The second phase is intended to choose the best from the pool. Yet, when looking at the activity through an ethnographic lens I found a different reality. Fundamentally, once the pool is created, individual candidates are systematically removed or eliminated from consideration one at a time not because of a positive evaluation of competitors but because of a negative evaluation that identifies individual flaws or reasons to reject a particular individual. The end effect of this process is that it risks reinforcing individual agendas and special interests by establishing a veto system wherein a particular candidate can be eliminated by individual members or special interests. Thus the final selection may or may not be the best candidate. More often the final candidate standing becomes the one who is least

objectionable to the range of interests participating in the search. This works against

controversial candidates, ones who appear different, ones who are particularly strong in

certain skills yet perceived lacking in others, and candidates who somehow appear less

than perfect. The process does not ensure that the final candidate is perfect, just less

imperfect. The final candidate standing becomes the one who has broad requisite

credentials, is least objectionable, and who is perceived to meet the amorphous concept of

fit. This shift in the process appears to contribute to the homogenization of candidates

and may serve as a significant barrier to diverse candidate. More focused, probing

research is needed in this regard to determine whether or not this aspect of the search

does work against diversity in the presidential office. This particular finding, for me,

suggests the need to consider major shifts in the search process by giving more candidates

the opportunity to connect in person with the committee and for the committee to

consider a final list as a whole rather than by eliminating finalists one by one.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Despite the universal agreement among informants that the traditional search

process is critical to establishing legitimacy of the process and the eventual selectee, a

number of issues emerged from the voices in the study. In some cases, they had

suggestions while in others they simply raised the issues.

TRUSTEE CONNECTION TO REALITY

In the view of numerous informants there is often a problem in trustees' lack of

direct knowledge concerning both the nature of the presidency and the reality of college

operations as perceived by faculty and staff. Trustees are, after all, focused on policy and

should not become directly involved in daily operations. Further, trustees depend on staff

prepared briefings for information on operations. This lack of firsthand knowledge

becomes a distinct issue when trustees are asked to choose the next best president of the

college. As East Consultant suggested, "All too frequently the trustees think they have to

get an outside candidate to initiate change. In their perception, the only action they can

take to initiate change is to bring in someone from the outside." This reality may go far

towards making sense of the fact that 77.3% of new presidents come from outside the

institution (*The American College President*, 2007, p. 87). The implications for internal

candidates can be chilling. Internal senior leaders who may have a serious emotional

commitment to their current institution are forced to take a calculated risk if they seek to

move up and the odds of that risk are stacked heavily against them. As referenced earlier,

Collins (2009) spoke about this issue when he observed that highly successful companies

routinely promote from within. Higher education institutions run counter to this practice

and, to a certain degree, this may also go towards explaining the average college

presidential tenure of six years. Given the increasing turnover of presidents, as

mentioned earlier, and the increasing reluctance of chief academic officers to step

forward, boards and committees will be under pressure to develop searches that offer

internal candidates better chances for success and the opportunity to apply without fear.

As a beginning point in this effort, trustees and committee members should make special

effort to develop deeper personal understanding of presidential duties. The Rural College

experience in using a past president as a search advisor is one potential model. At the

same time, trustees should evolve methods of realistically informing themselves

concerning the qualifications and performance of all key members of the campus

executive team.

The committee and trustees must make an informed decision about whether or not

to use executive search services. Care must be taken to properly evaluate the firm, their

services, their credentials, experience of prior clients, and what value-added the firm

brings to the table.

Additionally, trustees and committee members must takes steps to ensure that they

have a realistic view of the organization, its strengths, its weaknesses, and its needs for

the future. East Consultant suggested that one issue confronting search committees is the

tendency to choose a president "for today" or to meet trustees' perceptions of current

needs versus choosing a person who has the skills and experience that will be needed in

future endeavors yet to be established.

LENGTH OF THE SEARCH: PAINFUL OR POSITIVE

Presidential searches tend to take between 6-8 months to complete and often draw

negative comments over their length. However, East Consultant argues that this extended

timeframe may, in fact, be a strength of the process insofar as it gives committee

members time to coalesce their thinking and, as a result, elevate their expectations

without trying to meet tight timetables. Future searches at other institutions could benefit

from a conscious, positive discussion of the planned length of the search and how an

extended period of time can be used to the advantage of the search by allowing time for

substantive, safe conversations and negotiations among participants. Sufficient time will

allow for vetting of finalists' credentials and checking references must go beyond

evaluating transcripts and calling listed references. City College Board members both

indicated that prior searches could have yielded different outcomes if background checks

had been more effective. Both suggested that the executive search consultant working on

the searches failed to conduct thorough background checks [Note - the consultant

involved was not either of the consultants serving as informants for this study].

PRESIDENTIAL PROFILES: AN ENDLESS LIST

With one exception, informants suggested that characteristics and qualifications

listed in presidential profiles result from a brainstorming process among search

committee members. The final lists of qualifications are not negotiated, thus missing an

early opportunity for committee members to begin developing consensus on what skills

and experiences are most important for the next president to possess. A potential

contributing factor to this situation is a general hesitation by search committee members,

who have just begun to work together, to suggest that qualifications proposed by other

committee members are somehow less important than others. Results of this study

suggest that trustees and committee members must work closely together to develop a

clear, agreed upon view of what is needed in terms of professional and personal qualities

in the new president. This process of negotiating a common, realistic ground must

include a discussion of the issues and opportunities connected with the concept of a good

fit between president and institution.

INTEGRITY OF THE PROCESS

Process integrity depends on the participants, their values, and their perceptions of

their responsibilities. Several informants, notably City College President, City College

Board Members, and both consultants, commented on the risk posed to the integrity of

the process by individuals who may deliberately attempt to have their personal agenda

dominate the search agenda. The committee members must be chosen carefully and

supported with training with regards to their duties and responsibilities associated with

the search. The City College committee began their process with a candid discussion of

ethical issues and the need for confidentiality in the process. This discussion resulted in a

formal Code of Ethics for the committee that each member signed. In the case of

Independent Faculty Member, each committee member was counseled by the institution

human resources department on legal and ethical issues associated with searches.

In the final analysis, despite the amount of work, the time elapsed, and the

emotional commitment to concluding the process, consultants and committee members

alike all suggested that an institution cannot be afraid to start over if the search fails to

yield an acceptable candidate or if the search process is corrupted at any particular point.

DIVERSITY

Over the past twenty years the number and percentage of ethnic minority and

women presidents has increased in the community college ranks. As noted previously,

the greatest gains have been made by women and Hispanic candidates. Nevertheless, by

2006 86.1% of community college presidencies were still held by whites and men

continued to dominate the ranks with 71.2% of the community college presidencies.

Over the twenty year period between 1986 and 2006, women had gained from 7.9% to

28.8% and ethnic minority candidates had gained from 8.6% to 18.9% (*The American*

College President, 2007, p. 84). It is worth noting that the gains by women and by ethnic

minorities are not mutually exclusive numbers insofar as an ethnic minority woman

candidate counts in both totals. In fact, when the composition of the women presidencies

is examined, we find only 22% of women presidents are ethnic minority and 78% are

white (p. 20). Thus, gains in women and ethnic minority presidencies while promising

does not reveal the full picture. Likewise, as I heard from my informants there are two

even larger issues in play.

Based on the information from this study and the comments of the search

consultants referring to a larger number of searches nationally, it appears that ethnic

minority and women candidates may feel great pressure to leave their ethnicity or gender

in the interview doorway and attempt to appear more traditional, translated as white male,

during their screening. West Consultant attempts to deal with this situation by sensitizing

boards and committee members to issues related to diversity and she spends time

coaching ethnic minority candidates in their presentations. From my perspective, the best

first place to begin to deal with this particular issue is to bring it into open discussions

within the boards and search committees. This will require creation of a safe discussion

environment and perhaps even the support of search professionals or coaches who are

experienced in cultural issues. Yet, even when successful, ethnic minority candidates in

particular are faced with severe challenges to their success in their new positions. West

Consultant highlighted this issue in her comments and Valverde (2003) elaborated when

he wrote that hardship begins for an ethnic minority candidate after being selected.

Valverde said that ethnic minority presidents are constantly challenged, over scrutinized,

assumed by many to be an affirmative action hire, considered to be tokens, have to work

harder to gain respect, and are frequently denied access to resources that might be

available to a mainstream president (p. 107-108). This issue connects with my previous

point about authenticity in interviews. If a president comes into office having represented

themselves differently sustaining this image is very difficult and very likely to have a

negative impact on their performance. On the other hand, if they change back to their

authentic persona after selection they may face challenging repercussions.

Valverde went on to suggest that tolerance of ethnic minority candidates and

leaders is not the same as respect for those leaders and that without respect the road to

success is "mired in resentment" (p. 106). One of the great challenges in this process is

the dominance of trusteeships by whites. Vaughan and Weisman (1997) reported that

86.6% of all community college trustees were white (p. 17). Nevertheless, in a broader

context we are starting to see changes that may have positive long-term impact on the

presence of people of color among faculty and academic leadership ranks. Over the

period from 1990 to 2007 the ethnic mix of American college students has shifted

dramatically. In 1990 fully 77.6% of college undergraduates were white. By 2008 that

percentage had dropped significantly to 63.3% (U.S. Department of Education, 2010)

more fully in line with the overall white population in the U.S. which stood at 66.9%

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This positive shift in college access and participation bodes

well for future employment and potential participation in academic leadership ranks. As

the college preparation of minorities increases one can hope that the pipeline for

minorities to enter the academic world will grow proportionally. Another meaningful

finding within this research is the obvious success enjoyed by West Consultant as she

actively sought to promote and support success of ethnic minority candidates for top

leadership jobs. Her experience suggests that success is possible with conscious effort.

East Consultant's perception is perhaps a little more negative with regards to the future

for diverse candidates. He said,

> Although the search process is reasonably strong and it does generate substantive
>
> pools of candidates including candidates of color and women, committees and
>
> boards have no consistent commitment or inclination to hire diverse candidates.

INTERNAL VERSUS EXTERNAL CANDIDATES

Hiring data clearly suggests that there is a distinct preference for external

candidates with 64.1% of community college presidents being hired from outside their

home institution. This figure has changed since 1986 when the percentage stood at

73.7% (*The American College President*, 2007, p. 87). The research for this study has

identified some issues of personal risk participants associate with internal candidates.

Internal candidates feel varied levels of personal risk associated with declaring their

interest in the presidency only to be turned away by the committee. Once their interest is

known and they do not receive the nod for the top job then they risk being labeled as

losers in the presidential sweepstakes which may cut into their credibility with colleagues.

Moreover, as a losing candidate they have to work with the winner who may perceive

them to be a threat. A surprising finding for me was the notion that committee members

themselves feel a sense of risk associated with internal candidates. Committee members

may feel a sense of risk associated with their perceived failure to support an internal

colleague and then find themselves back working with that colleague who may harbor

hard feelings. The full range of issues associated with internal candidacies is beyond the

scope of this particular study. The issue does warrant further examination particularly in

light of the strong findings reported by Collins (2009) who suggested that in many

circumstances the long-term sustainability and growth of an organization is served best by

strong internal candidates who rise to the top position.

TRANSPARENCY OF PROCESS: NECESSARY YET CONTROVERSIAL

All informants in this study agreed that presidents must be chosen using an open

search process and that the search must be as transparent as possible. They unanimously

agreed that the absence of a transparent search would result in severe challenge to

legitimacy of the search by all campus constituencies. But when I asked informants to

describe their perception of what constitutes an acceptable or desired level of

transparency their responses began to diverge. I found little agreement among my

informants and looked no further than The *Chronicle of Higher Education t*o note that the

issue of open searches is controversial and is a subject of debate throughout the higher

education sector. The debate about search transparency is moving from the board and

committee rooms into the public arena. Within the past few years, several significant

articles focused solely on issues of search transparency appeared in the journal:

Confidentiality in Senior Searches (Dowdall, 1999), *Choose Public-College Presidents in*

the Sunshine, but Know When to Draw the Shades (Hearn and McLendon, 2004),

Keeping Searches Secret (Arone, 2004), and *Too Much Sunshine Can Complicate*

Presidential Searches (Tilsey, 2010). These articles introduced issues associated with

openness in searches but offered little in the way of consistent suggestions for resolving

the conflict between the public right to know and the privacy of individual candidates.

Independent President ruefully tells the story of a search in recent years when he was a

finalist and was told that his name would be confidential until a certain point in the

search. He said,

> At the time it was not fun but in retrospect it is kind of humorous. I had filed and
>
> interviewed for a presidency in my home town and was told that I would be
>
> informed if I was to be placed on the short list. I understood that I would have the
>
> opportunity to be informed prior to the announcement so that I could advise my
>
> board members and close staff. As it happened, the college released the names to
>
> the local newspaper before any candidate found out. I heard about it when my
>
> mother read the paper and called to ask, "Is there anything going on in your life
>
> that I should know about?" Quite honestly it put me in a very difficult position
>
> with my colleagues here in that it appeared I was not being direct with them and
>
> they felt hurt that I wasn't the one to let them know. I also had to put in a lot of
>
> time working to repair relationships with my board. I didn't enjoy it at the time
>
> but it is pretty funny now. I always make sure to call mom first.

Potential candidates have to confront the risk of being seen by their trustees and

colleagues as looking for a new position; suggesting some level of dissatisfaction with

their current position. National observers and informants for this study suggest that the

risk is very real and that higher education is not free from issues of retaliation and

retribution. As described earlier, Independent College President, well respected at his

home institution, recently withdrew from another search for a new presidency but not

before his name was released to the public and to his trustees. In his experience, his

trustees are happy to see him remain yet he feels a distinct pressure to reassure the

trustees that he is reliable and will not leave at the first possible opportunity. The issue of

openness is made more complex insofar as states have enacted a variety of sunshine laws

related to the actions of state agencies including the search and selection for key officials.

These rules vary across the country and have consequences that were not always intended

by the lawmakers. West Consultant is concerned that the level of openness required by

the committee and relevant state law has the potential from discouraging highly qualified

candidates from seeking excellent opportunities lest they undermine their relationships at

their home institution. However, even she agrees that some level of openness is required

in order to establish the legitimacy of the process. Balancing the need for openness and

the desire for candidate privacy is an ongoing challenge that all search committees and

trustees must confront. Regardless of the lack of overt consensus, it appears to me that

there are several general guidelines that should be followed including the obvious

requirement to follow relevant state law, establish a clear set of guidelines in writing at

the beginning of the process, and protect candidates names and confidentiality as long as

possible in the process within the rule of law. Candidates and external stakeholders need

to understand the rules up front so that there are no surprises later in the process.

Implications for Future Research

As with all studies that are limited in focus or scope, an inevitable outcome of the

research is that it points to the need for added research or the potential for new studies.

This research is no exception. Although I feel that the research has accomplished many

of the objectives I set forth, I can say without hesitation that I end the study with as many or more questions than when I began. The following constitute areas that I would recommend especially for future research based on my study.

WHAT IS A GOOD PRESIDENTIAL COMMUNICATOR ?

Informants, and position postings, emphasized the need for the president to be a good communicator but few could describe exactly what they meant by the statement. Given the almost universal agreement as to the importance of good communications and informant's inability to describe what that means, the need for further research appears clear. What are the characteristics of good communications? Do these characteristics change depending on context? These and other questions would be a solid foundation for new research.

CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR DIVERSE CANDIDATES

With regards to current ethnic minority presidents; to what extent do they feel able to authentically display their culture and values in their current positions? In what ways did they choose to show, compromise and/or hide their identity in order to be selected for a presidency? What are the attractions and the perceived benefits of a presidency that might cause a candidate to compromise their identity in order to attain the position?

THE IMPACT OF UNIONS AND RANK AND TENURE ON THE PROCESS

Are there differences in perceptions of the search process when unions or tenured faculty are part of the constituency? In this case, my research focused on schools with at-will or continuing appointment contracts. East Consultant suggested, "In my experience the presence of faculty tenure or unions has a tendency to radicalize the process and force

hiring agendas to change. I wonder if this really changes the outcome or simply affects people's perceptions of the process. This would certainly be an interesting line of research."

EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS FOR DIVERSE PRESIDENTS VERSUS WHITE PRESIDENTS

How does tenure of ethnic minority presidencies compare to tenure of white presidencies? And how many ethnic minority presidents are able to move to a second presidency? The recent gains by women and minorities are important but how deep is the commitment of the sector to their leadership as presidents?

SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR DIVERSE PRESIDENTS

What challenges do ethnic minority presidents face during their first one-three years in office and how do their experiences compare or contrast to white colleagues in the same timeframe?

WHO HIRES ETHNIC MINORITY PRESIDENTS?

At institutions where ethnic minority presidents are present, what are the ethnic and professional backgrounds of the trustees who hired that president? Also, in cases where diverse candidates were hired, are there any key differences in the process or underlying values of the institution and participants that led to the successful hiring of ethnic minority presidents?

Conclusion

If one hallmark of good research is that it raises new questions and identifies new lines of inquiry then I believe that this project has been successful. Moreover, I believe

that this research has contributed to our critical understanding of the presidential search

process by revealing that we can, in fact, do meaningful research into a process heretofore

perceived as impenetrable, by identifying potential ways for the process to improve and

avoid ethical lapses, and by providing informative research that can be used by future

committees as they craft their own processes.

At the end of the day I vividly recall the words of East Consultant, often the most

eloquent and insightful critic of the search process, who said, "For all the problems of

searches they are surprisingly successful."

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Appendix A

Search Committee Members: Interview Questions

Verbal note – [given prior to commencing interview]…At no time during these questions do I want you to comment on the specifics of any candidate or divulge any specific conversations or deliberations that took place during your participation on this committee. Please feel free to comment on the question ahead of your answer if you think there is any risk of commenting on privileged information and we will adjust the question in order to avoid this possibility.

1. Will you please describe your current position with the college and the nature of your professional background prior to your current position? – Is this the position you held at the time of your service on the Presidential Search Committee?

2. How were you selected to be a member of the Search Committee?

3. Did you have any formal training or orientation, or was any offered during the committee process, that prepared you for participation as a member of the committee? – Had you served on similar committees in the past?

4. To what extent had you known or worked with other committee members prior to the search activity? – And how big was the committee?

5. What was the specific charge of your committee? Screening? Selection? Recommendation?

6. Please outline the chronology of the search committee activities?

7. Did your committee take any specific actions intended to promote a diverse pool of candidates in terms of candidate gender and ethnicity? Did you find this to be a challenging process?

8. Without referring to any individual candidate, to what degree do you think that candidates were able to effectively articulate their personal identity, based on their gender and ethnicity, in their documents and interviews?

9. Did your process employ the services of a professional search consultant? – If so, can you describe your view of their role in the process? What was the basis for the decision to employ an external search consultant?

10. In your opinion, what are the characteristics, both personal and professional, of an exemplary college president? To what degree do you think that the search process was able to effectively evaluate candidates in terms of these values?

11. In addition to professional and personal characteristics that a committee may outline as desired for a president, the issue of "fit" is often raised as a consideration. When you think about the term "fit" what does that suggest to you in terms of presidential qualifications and personal characteristics?

12. Again, without referring to a particular candidacy, what were some of the most important aspects of the search process that had an impact on your final recommendation? For instance, what was the importance given to candidate documents, interviews, campus feedback, etc.?

13. By the end of the process did you personally feel that you had a reasonable, realistic view of individual candidates, their skills, their experiences, and their personal identity?

14. Is there anything that you would like to tell me about the search process that I have not asked?

Presidents: Interview Questions

1. Please describe the nature of your professional and educational background prior to your current position at this college.

2. Please outline the search process you went through in terms of the steps and requirements.

3. Was this your first presidential application/search? – If not, how many other searches have you participated in and what similarities do you observe between the processes?

4. To what extent did the information presented to you during the course of the search reflect the reality you encountered when you assumed your duties? – Were there any significant surprises?

5. What about your own identity in terms of gender or cultural background influenced you during the course of the search process?

6. Did the open portions of the search process present any risk to you in terms of your previous employment/position?

7. To what degree do you think the process placed emphasis on your professional skills and experience? Your educational background? Your personal skills?

8. In your opinion, what are the characteristics, both personal and professional, of an exemplary college president?

9. Finally, what didn't the process cover or discover about you that would be important to your success in the position?

Executive Search Consultants: Interview Questions

1. In your experience, can you describe the most common role of a professional search consultant in presidential searches? – What limits are there on your actions and engagement with participants?

2. Can you describe the nature of your experience, success, and failures in actively recruiting candidates from diverse backgrounds for presidential positions?

3. Do you perceive that candidates from diverse backgrounds or gender come to the search process with concerns and issues different from white, male candidates?

4. In your experience, are candidates from diverse backgrounds able to effectively articulate and represent their identities in the search processes?

5. Again, in your experience, do you believe that search committees have clear, realistic views of the preferred experiences and qualifications of candidates? – In the final analysis what is your view of the final "turning point" that drives a final decision on a candidacy?

6. As a consultant, do you engage the Board or is your work primarily focused on the search committee?

7. Over the course of your experience have you encountered "types" of presidents/candidates that you can describe? – If so, is there a specific type, or set of

characteristics that is more often successful in final selection? – In other words, do you perceive that there is a preferred "type" of candidate more often than not?

8. In your opinion, what are the characteristics, both personal and professional, of an exemplary college president?

9. Without discussing specific candidacies, have you encountered situations where the recommending committee (the search committee) outcomes are rejected or discounted by the Board responsible for the final selection?

Board Members: Interview Questions

1. Can you describe the structure of your most recent search? That is, did you operate with a separate search committee? – If so, what was the role of the search committee and what was the role/responsibility of the Board?

2. Who was responsible for appointment of the search committee members and what considerations were given to the qualifications of the members?

3. To what extent, or not, was the Board engaged in developing the preferred/required criteria of the prospective candidates?

4. Can you describe your own professional and personal background prior to joining the Board?

5. In your opinion, what are the characteristics, both personal and professional, of an exemplary college president?

Appendix B

The University of New Mexico Main Campus IRB
Consent to Participate in Research

Choosing the Next Best President: Examining the Inner Dynamics of Presdiential
Search Committees at Two Community Colleges

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study that is being done by Larry Sanderson, who is the Principal Investigator and his associates, from the Department of Educational Leadership. This research is studying how individual members of presidential search committees interpret their duties and responsibilities while serving on the committee and the nature of their personal preparation to participate in the committee activities.

This study is new and has not been previously conducted.

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your recent experience as a participant in a presidential search process at your college. Two people will take part in this study at the University of New Mexico. Approximately 10 people will be taking part in this study at two separate colleges in the southwest and 2 individuals associated with professional executive search firms will participate from outside the state.

This form will explain the research study, and will also explain the possible risks as well as the possible benefits to you. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. If you have any questions, please ask one of the study investigators.

What will happen if I decide to participate?

If you agree to participate, the following things will happen:

You will be contacted by the Principal Investigator to arrange a convenient time and location for a personal interview. The interview will take approximately one hour and may be followed by correspondence or telephone communications concerning points of clarification. In some instances you may be asked for a second in-person interview. Prior to the interview you will be presented with this Consent Form and the contents will be reviewed with you prior to beginning any interview questions.

How long will I be in this study?

Participation in this study will take a total of two hours hours over a period of 10-14 days.

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What are the risks of being in this study?

- There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study.

For more information about risks, ask one of the study investigators.

What are the benefits to being in this study?

There will be no benefit to you from participation in the study. However, it is hoped that the information gained from this study will help inform future presidential search processes at other colleges.

What other choices do I have if I do not want to be in this study?

Participation is totally voluntary and you may choose against participation in the study at any time.

How will my information be kept confidential?

We will take measures to protect your privacy and the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data.

Information contained in your study records is used by Larry Sanderson, in some cases it will be shared with the sponsor of the study. The University of New Mexico IRB that oversees human subject research, and the UNM faculty sponsor will be permitted to access your records. There may be times when we are required by law to share your information. However, your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

Your name and any personal identifiers will be deleted from the final notes of the study and, at no time, will your name or organizational affiliation be listed in the final publication. All references to specific colleges or individuals by name will be eliminated from the recorded notes and final publication.

What are the costs of taking part in this study?

There are no costs to you for participation in this study.

Will I be paid for taking part in this study?

____Initials   Page 2 of 4   IRB#: XX-XXX
Version: XX/XX/XX

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There is no payment to you for participation in this study.

How will I know if you learn something new that may change my mind about participating?

You will be informed of any significant new findings that become available during the course of the study, such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from participating in the research or new alternatives to participation that might change your mind about participating.

Can I stop being in the study once I begin?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point in this study without affecting any services to which you are entitled.

Whom can I call with questions or complaints about this study?
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints at any time about the research study, Larry Sanderson, or his/her associates and/or Dr. Alicia Chavez will be glad to answer them at 575-605-1955 (Sanderson) and 505-277-4387 (Chavez) or by e-mail at larrys@unm.edu or afchavez@unm.edu. If you need to contact someone after business hours or on weekends, please call 575-605-1955 and ask for Larry Sanderson. If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team in regards to any complaints you have about the study, you may call the UNM IRB at (505) 272-1129.

Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research subject?
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may call the UNM IRB at (505) 272-1129. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human subjects. For more information, you may also access the IRB website at http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/HRRC/maincampusirbhome.shtml.

Consent

You are making a decision whether to participate (or to have your child participate) in this study. Your signature below indicates that you read the information provided (or the information was read to you). By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your (your child's) legal rights as a research subject.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Subject (print)   Signature of Adult Subject   Date

INVESTIGATOR SIGNATURE
I have explained the research to the subject or his/her legal representative and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

_____
Name of Investigator/ Research Team Member

_____   _____
Signature of Investigator   Date

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