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Leadership Continuity: Enhancing the Cycle of Leadership in Academic Departments

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LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY: ENHANCING THE CYCLE OF LEADERSHIP IN ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

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DEDICATION

To Mark, Jack and Ben, for always believing in me and giving me my Sunday mornings at Rao's.

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ABSTRACT

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IN ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS

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In the corporate world, leaders typically plan for succession, carefully grooming their heir apparent. In academia, however, it is rare for such planning to occur at the institutional level, much less the departmental level. This multiple case study explores how twelve department chairs in one public research university think about leadership development for their departments. While succession planning – as defined in traditional management literature – does not occur in academic departments, current chairs are active in promoting leadership continuity – purposefully preparing and cultivating potential leaders who have the skills and knowledge to most readily step in as chair so that departments can maintain momentum even during times of leadership transition. There are three dimensions that have been derived from the analysis: context, process, and person. This study describes how these three dimensions influence the ways in which chairs seek to enhance leadership capacity in their departments, provides policy and practice recommendations for institutions and departments to support these activities, and offers suggestions for future research in this critical area of academic leadership.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Higher education is founded on the principle of shared responsibility and authority between administrators and faculty (Altbach, 1999). During the latter part of the 18th century, as higher education evolved and faculty interests developed into recognizable academic disciplines (Finkelstein, 1997; Tucker, 1992), faculty members, as the experts in their disciplines, became decision-makers. While they did not always have the final say, faculty determined the curriculum, hiring of faculty, and the recruitment of students (Geiger, 1999; Jencks & Riesman, 1968). Throughout the 19th century (Finkelstein, 1997), higher education as an industry continued to grow exponentially, and as a result, a corps of professional academics developed (Finkelstein, 1997). Power and authority was eventually distributed to faculty members serving in administrative roles, such as department chair, dean, provost, and president (Finkelstein, 1997). This largely remains so today, despite the growing trend towards non-academics as institutional presidents (Altbach, 1999; Fain, 2005; Finkelstein, 1997). The roles that these administrators play – and their ability to fulfill these critical leadership roles – can have a huge impact on the success of an institution (Gmelch, 2002; Green & McDade, 1991; Moore & Burrows, 2001).

Institutions, and higher education as a whole, have a greater probability of being successful if these administrators have the skills and tools to be capable and competent leaders (Green & McDade, 1991). Green and McDade (1991) view such preparation as a win-win situation for both the individual and the institutions: "Leadership development is an investment both in the short-term effectiveness of an institution – increasing job performance and satisfaction – and in its long-range health – identifying and preparing people to assume greater responsibility and increase their contribution to the institution" (p. 13). In-depth analysis of the preparation of those at the first rung of the academic career ladder – department chairs – will shed light on strategies for developing a corps of future higher education leaders who not only understand their roles and responsibilities but also the issues and challenges facing higher education as a whole. The success of department chairs takes on greater urgency as increasingly significant challenges now confront post-secondary education (Altbach, 1999; Berdahl & McConnell, 1999; Katsinas & Kempner, 2005; Selingo, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

Higher education is approaching a critical juncture in its history and a new generation of leaders will need to be developed and supported. Currently, higher education is expecting a wave of retirements (Katsinas & Kempner, 2005) in the next ten to fifteen years. From presidents to professors, the majority of academics are nearing retirement age, across all types of institutions (Katsinas & Kempner, 2005; Leubsdorf, 2006). As faculty members from the baby boomer generation – those who started their academic careers in the 1960s – look towards retirement, institutions need to be prepared to replace those in leadership positions. As Leubsdorf (2006) notes, "an estimated 6,000 jobs in postsecondary-education administration will have to be filled annually between 2004 and 2014, the result of the field's growth and the retirement of current workers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics" (p. A51). As institutions prepare to fill these future vacancies, it will be essential to have well-qualified and trained administrators ready to take on critical leadership positions during what may likely be times of great difficulty for higher education as a whole (Altbach, 1999; Katsinas & Kempner, 2005).

In recent decades, colleges and universities have experienced an unprecedented wave of attacks on a variety of fronts (Altbach, 1999; Berdahl & McConnell, 1999; Selingo, 2003). Newman, Couturier, and Scurry (2004) contend that these increasing pressures are due to the changing market place which has led to greater competition, in an environment with less government regulation than has existed in the past. Institutions must now compete "for students and for research dollars, in fund-raising and in sports, and particularly for prestige" (p. 10). Newman et al. are blunt in their argument:

> Higher education has been accorded a special place in society, separate from and above the marketplace throng. Today, however, the growing influence of the market in higher education means that the search for truth is rivaled by a search for revenues. (p. 4)

Competition in the new marketplace has led to challenges for higher education on a variety of fronts: financial support; accessibility and affordability, which are impacted by changing demographics; calls for greater accountability; and the need to keep up with technological changes.

Financially, public institutions across the country have experienced significant uncertainty in the levels of support they receive from state and federal governments (Weerts & Ronca, 2006; Yudof, 2002). Historically, state governments provided a significant proportion of operating budgets and capital costs of public institutions of higher education (Key, 1996). Colleges and universities established under the historic Morrill Act have, as a part of their mission, a responsibility to give back to the local and state communities, including educating citizens to help protect the nation's prosperity (Key, 1996). While the land-grant mission is still strong as many colleges and universities continue to work with and for local communities (Key, 1996), most states have backed away from their financial commitment through drastic budget cuts to state institutions (Alexander, 2006). Since 1980, the proportion of state dollars supporting higher education has dropped from 44% to just under one third (Selingo, 2003). Some institutions, such as The Pennsylvania State University and The University of Virginia, have taken to referring to themselves as state-related or even state-assisted as a way of signaling decreasing levels of support from the state (Hebel, 2005). The current global economic recession has sharpened the crises facing many public institutions, as states have pulled back even further on their support of higher education (Wolverton, 2008).

Universities and colleges have also seen federal support for research decline in recent years. While federal money has been diverted to the Iraqi war and related homeland security efforts (Giroux & Searls Giroux, 2004), federal agencies such as the National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health have watched their budgets shrink (Borrego, 2003), leaving correspondingly fewer dollars available for institutions through peer-review processes. As Brainard and Field (2005) note, these reductions come on the heels of an extended period of only nominal increases to agency budgets. As the global economy continues to sink into a recession, it is unrealistic to expect major infusions of public sector money for higher education, which must also compete with other pressing funding needs facing states, such as Medicare, roads and bridges, and social security (Yudof, 2002). While the economic stimulus package recently passed by the federal government offers some much needed relief to higher education, this funding is only for a two-year period. It will provide short-term bridging opportunities but will not fix the structural deficit that many institutions are facing as operating funds have been cut by state governments (Field, 2009).

Decreasing support at the state and federal levels has led to years of drastic increases in tuition and fees at many institutions (Glater, 2007; Prevost, 2005; Schmidt, 2004). A 2003 study conducted by the College Board found that there was a direct correlation between cutbacks in state budgets and increases in tuition at universities and colleges (Farrell, 2003). Students at many institutions have reacted by holding protest rallies to decry the rising costs of college and to demand significant decreases in tuition and fees (Lipka, 2007; Schmidt, 2004; Schworm, 2009). Students are accusing higher education institutions of pricing themselves so high that accessibility is limited to those with the financial means to attend (Lipka, 2007). The backlash against the increased cost to attend college has been fierce, forcing, as Newman et al. (2004) contends, the use of financial aid as "a competitive weapon" (p. 10). In their scenario, as financial aid at both the institutional and governmental levels has shifted from need based to merit based in an effort to recruit the best students, it is the neediest students who are losing access to higher education. As institutions, especially those with endowments robust enough to support the costs, continue to discount tuition through scholarships and grants, "both attention and money are increasingly focused on the so-called better students" (Newman et al., 2004, p. 11). Newman et al. continue their argument by stating,

> If there were substantial resources – governmental, institutional, and family – available, if student aid for students in need were rising as rapidly as tuition or more rapidly, then the price competition for better students could be seen as a positive. What is emerging is growing financial hardship for less advantaged students and less affluent institutions. (p. 11)

Given the current situation, institutions of higher education, especially public universities and colleges, have not only been forced to raise tuition and fees but to also develop creative fundraising strategies to fill the holes left by state and federal reductions. Most universities and colleges are now engaged in aggressive capital campaigns, hoping to persuade private corporations and individuals to donate monies to support the institution (Strout, 2007). Strout (2007) notes that 28 institutions are currently conducting capital campaigns to raise more than $1 billion for their individual campuses, although Masterson (2009) notes the negative impact that the current economic crisis is having on higher education fund raising efforts. In an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Blumenstyk (2007) reports on the mounting pressure on wealthy institutions to use their endowment funds to help improve access and lower tuition costs for families. In Congress, a Republican senator is proposing that "rich universities [be required] to spend at least 5 percent of their endowment, as private foundations are now required to do, or lose the tax exemption they enjoy on their endowment earnings" (p. A1). Many of these institutions have since seen their endowments shrink as investments have suffered with the downturn in the market (Blumenstyk, 2009b). Institutions are also aggressively seeking federal earmarks by hiring lobbyists (Brainard, 2007) and continuing to cultivate relationships with industry (Kezar, 2004). Such efforts will persist in the foreseeable future as the costs of running large organizations and sprawling campuses continue to rise due to cost of living increases and soaring utility and construction costs (Springen, 2005).

At the same time that state and federal governments have scaled back on their financial support, the expectations of legislators, taxpayers, and parents have continued to climb higher. Pressure has increased on institutions to be held accountable for the services they provide to local and state constituents, to demonstrate student learning outcomes, and to justify any continued investment (Berdahl & McConnell, 1999; Chait, 2002). As Berdahl and McConnell (1999) note, "[higher education] will increasingly have to explain itself, defend its essential character, and demonstrate that its service is worth the cost" (p. 72). Honan and Teferra (2001) see the calls for greater accountability as a breakdown in the trust that institutions have historically enjoyed:

> The three-fold pattern of governance in US colleges and universities involving an institution's trustees, faculty, and president has depended in the past on a large measure of external public confidence and internal institutional loyalty, mutual trust, professional commitment, and impartial judgment. (p. 187)

When that trust is broken, it is the institution that is at risk. Chait (2002) argues that, as pressure has increased for universities and colleges to be more accountable, institutions have had to learn to provide justification for their continued support. For years, the academy was an impenetrable ivory tower, protected from prying eyes. But as taxpayers, parents, and students – in addition to legislators and funding agencies – continue to clamor for greater accountability (Chait, 2002), leadership roles take on greater importance. It is institutional leaders who will be responsible for convincing constituents that their investment – through tax dollars and tuition payments – will pay substantial dividends.

At the intersection of increasing costs, decreasing budgets and mounting calls for accountability lies the critical issue of accessibility. As Newman et al. (2004) note, "American society has always treasured the concept of social mobility founded on pluck and determination. Today, social mobility requires more – a college education" (p. 56). As college costs have escalated, students from low-income families are finding it that much more difficult to take advantage of a college education (Newman et al., 2004).

Zusman (2005) notes that, despite the fact that in 2000, "over one-quarter of all college students were ethnic minorities, up from 16 percent in 1980…college participation, especially in four-year colleges and universities, remains unequal" (p. 128). Only half of African-American and Latino high school graduates attend college compared to two-thirds of their white counterparts (Zusman, 2005). Almost half of those minority students are enrolled in two-year colleges and less than half of them transfer to four-year institutions (Zusman, 2005). Zusman argues that the growing interest in higher education will be impacted directly by the declining state allocations to higher education and that institutions will not be able to meet the greater demand. Additionally, as prices continue to soar, students from low-income families will be increasingly turned away because they simply do not have the means to afford tuition and fees (Zusman, 2005). Finally, Zusman argues that,

> The increasingly diverse student body will continue to change the face of the campus. Colleges will need to develop ways to respond effectively, especially to those low-income, first-generation African American and Latino student who do make it to college but who tend to drop out at higher rates than do middle-class white students. (p. 132)

Institutions of higher education will need to find ways to both meet the demand of an increasingly diverse applicant pool and to find ways to support these students when they come to campus.

Another challenge facing institutions of higher education is the ever-changing technological advances and their impact on both teaching and learning. Newman et al. (2004) stress that the changes will not just alter teaching methods but will forever change how higher education is organized. To support this argument, Newman et al. point to a National Academy of Sciences report which argued that the "change is likely to be revolutionary – in the way both teaching and research are conducted – resulting in fundamental changes in how universities are structured" (p. 24). Gumport and Chun (2005) argue that a historical overview of the intersection between higher education and technology demonstrate that, until recently, those technologies which could be seamlessly adopted without upsetting the established educational paradigm were done so with little controversy. One such example is the advent of the photocopier, which easily replaced the mimeograph (Gumport & Chun, 2005). Technology, however, that "radically alters the basic structures of the educational process or challenges long-held, taken-for-granted assumptions…is likely to face…opposition" (Gumport & Chun, 2005, p. 400). They further contend that it is only in recent years, as technology has become so pervasive and flexible, that such an argument no longer holds true. From the increasing popularity of web research among high school seniors making decisions about where to attend college to the widespread use of laptops in classrooms, technology has changed how higher education operates at both the macro and micro levels. As Newman et al. state, "new technologies add to the demand…for workforce and civic skills, but they also add to the need for citizens able to analyze, reason, and make critical judgments" (p. 48). Institutions of higher education must constantly adjust both their administrative functions and the critical teaching and learning processes so that their constituents – faculty, staff, students and leaders – are prepared for the constant change brought upon by technology.

Given the tremendous pressures facing higher education, it is critical that academic leaders are prepared and trained to meet these challenges (Walker, 1999). Many colleges and universities, however, do not emphasize leadership as a necessary skill for faculty, much less the graduate students who will eventually become professors

(Gmelch, 2002a). From the time a graduate student enters a doctoral program with the intent of joining the academy as a faculty member, s/he is instructed on conducting research, writing successful research grant proposals, and teaching skillfully (Austin, 2002). The focus of graduate education is on learning to be a productive researcher and scholar within the culture and expectations of a specific discipline, not in learning how to be an administrator or leader. Institutions of higher education are providing greater support to pre-tenure faculty to help them acclimate to their new institution and to the demands of life before tenure (Austin, 2002; Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy & Beach, 2006). Because the quality of the faculty determines an institution's reputation (Lombardi, 2004), it is essential that universities and colleges cultivate their junior faculty and support them in their efforts to be successful in the classroom and in the studio, field, or laboratory. Faculty members themselves often define their own identity through their research and scholarship. This emphasis on the professional development of junior faculty has, to some extent, eclipsed the larger issue of the development of leaders. Faculty members are often discouraged from seeking administrative roles by their peers (Kauffman, 1990) and, with few notable exceptions, professional development programs for faculty do not typically offer leadership training (Gmelch, 2002a).

Given these ongoing challenges, institutions of higher education must now turn their attention to what happens at the level of the academic department. By doing so, universities and colleges can find best practices for developing strong department leaders, thus strengthening and securing their own future by cultivating and preparing potential leaders now.

Purpose of the Study

This study provides an in-depth examination of how department chairs think about the future leadership of the department and approach leadership transitions. How transitions in leadership at the departmental level occur is also explored in order to gain a clearer understanding of what institutions can do to support department chair succession and transition planning.

Research Question

This research project seeks to answer one critical question: How do department chairs think about their own succession?

Significance of the Study

At the heart of any institution of higher education lies the faculty body who historically have had authority over academic decisions (Jencks & Riesman, 1968). As higher education evolved, the faculty organized into departments according to disciplinary boundaries (Finkelstein, 1997). These departments are microcosms of the broader academic community, organizations unto themselves that operate in the context and culture of the discipline, the institution, and the society in which they function. They also serve as an administrative unit, vested with power and responsibility, as faculty members are ultimately responsible for curricular decisions (Altbach, 1999; Tucker, 1992). As Wolverton, Gmelch and Sorenson (1998) contend, "nearly 80% of all administrative decisions in universities take place at the department level" (p. 210). Despite the many and varied responsibilities departments are charged with, the role of the department chair has not historically been viewed as an essential position: "Above, below, and in between these two positions [president and dean], management has been extremely limited, and few substantive management positions are to be found" (Bolton & Genck, 1971, p. 282). Despite this perspective, the chair is indeed responsible for the well-being of the department, and by extension, the academic strength and mission of the institution. As Newman et al. (2004) note:

> To thrive and even survive into the future, each university and college needs a clear strategy that defines the role the institution is determined to lay and a concrete plan to implement that strategy. In other words, there must be institutional change that responds to the changing nature of the broader system of higher education. To achieve this requires different and more effective leadership, not just at the top but also throughout the institution, leadership with the ability to draw the whole organization in the process of change, assessment, and constant and unremitting improvement. (p. 7)

How institutions plan and prepare for leadership transitions at all levels of the organization can have a direct impact on their survival, even more so given the changing nature of higher education as a whole. A close examination of succession can provide insights that will enable institutions to find the best ways of ensuring that future generations of academic leaders are better prepared and trained than their predecessors for the challenges they will be facing. Given the essential nature of the roles chairs play in an institution, surprisingly little empirical research has been conducted on the process that occurs as a department chair is preparing to step down. A small number of empirical studies have explored the socialization process that new chairs undergo (Aziz, Mullins, Balzer, Grauer, Burnfield, Lodato, & Cohen-Powless, 2005; Gmelch & Parkay, 1999) but they do not shed light on how new department leaders are developed or what efforts outgoing chairs might make in order to ensure smooth leadership transitions. Additional literature focuses on the professional preparation of department chairs based on anecdotal – not empirical – evidence (Hecht, 2004; Seagren, Creswell & Wheeler, 1993; Thomas & Schuh, 2004). Closer exploration of the succession planning process – or lack thereof –

can offer insight into ways that institutions might be hampering their own efforts to have strong academic departments and can provide institutions with recommended best practices to support their departmental leaders.

Assumptions

The two key assumptions behind this study are that department chairs do indeed contemplate the issue of succession before the day they are going to step down and that such succession planning is important to an institution's – and to a department's – well-being and overall success. Anecdotal evidence suggests that departments rarely plan ahead for leader transitions and little training is offered to incoming chairs.

Operational Definitions

The term *department chair* will be used to include anyone who serves as an "administrator to oversee the functions and operations of [a] unit or department" (Dyer & Miller, 1999, p. 5). This includes leading a department that awards undergraduate and/or graduate degrees and has tenure track faculty, whether they hold the title department chair or department head.

The term *succession planning* is defined as the process used to strategically develop potential leaders who are prepared to take on leadership roles when called upon (Bisbee & Miller, 2006).

The term *leadership* focuses on those activities that academic administrators must undertake, including but not limited to budgetary and personnel decision-making, advocacy, relationship building, and academic planning (Dyer & Miller, 1999; McDade, 1987).

The term *transition* is operationally defined strictly as the change from one leader to another. It does not address the search and selection process that departments undergo.

Overview

Given that the purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how department chairs think about leadership succession, this paper is organized as follows. Chapter one has provided a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study and why the study itself is significant. Chapter two begins with an overview of the available literature on the role that department chairs play in the organization and their general lack of preparation and training for the responsibilities facing them. Next, previous studies on leadership development – and the importance of providing support and opportunities for future leaders is explored. Lastly, a close examination of research on leaders who have similar roles in related fields will offer insight into how succession planning occurs in the corporate world and at other positions in the education sector. Chapter three describes the conceptual framework, methodology, and data analysis. Chapter four provides the findings of the study while chapter five discusses the implications of the findings and offers policy and practice recommendations for institutions and departments in addition to suggestions for future research in this critical area.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

At a university or college, countless core administrative functions occur at the departmental level (Baker & Zey-Ferrell, 1982) and department chairs are increasingly seen as key decision makers at institutions of higher education (Wolverton, Gmelch & Sorenson, 1998). Yet, little attention is paid to the skills that chairs bring to the position and many department chairs lack the basic tools necessary to manage a modern academic department (Gmelch & Parkay, 1999; Thomas & Schuh, 2004). As a result, despite the increasing complexity of the role of department chair (Thomas & Schuh, 2004), incoming chairs are frequently thrown into their new role without any mentoring, preparation, or orientation. Indeed, from the early days of graduate school, future academics are encouraged to find a research niche in which to excel (Gmelch, 2002a) while aspiring towards administration or a leadership role is neither encouraged nor rewarded (Gmelch, 2002; Kauffman, 1990). Institutions, however, remain in great need of leaders at all levels (Gmelch, 2002a, 2002b; Katsinas & Kempner, 2005), and especially department chairs, a role essential to the overall success of any institution.

Given that there is little empirical research on succession planning at the department chair level, it is useful to examine this issue through a series of other lenses that can provide some insight to the issues facing department chairs. This chapter will first provide an overview of the available literature on the importance of the chair's role and the challenges that chairs face in order to explain why institutions should pay closer attention to the preparation of these departmental leaders. Next, the lack of leadership development efforts and programs in higher education will be examined. This will help to explore the reasons why so little focus has been paid to the development and preparation of department chairs. Finally, an exploration of leadership succession efforts in the corporate world, university and colleges presidents, and K-12 principals will provide context for such efforts at the department chair level.

Department Chairs: Roles and Responsibilities

At many institutions, the role of the department chair is often the first administrative position held by faculty members (McDade, 1987). As it can be the start of a career in academic administration and has a wide range of responsibilities, the role of chair offers a unique opportunity for individual faculty members to gain a broad understanding of the issues facing both an academic department and the institution at large. For institutions, a deeper understanding of the roles, responsibilities and challenges that chairs often face can offer greater insight into the workings of an academic department and help to inform best practices for the development of department chairs who are prepared for their new role.

The department chair is responsible for guiding a department through the obstacles and challenges it faces. Decisions that must be made by the department chair include offers of tenure or promotion; critical budgetary choices, whether the financial outlook is good or bad; curriculum decisions; and space and facilities planning with often limited available resources (Diamond, 1996; Wilson, 2001). In addition to having responsibility for the overall direction, strength and health of an academic department, there are other seemingly never-ending, less explicit tasks and roles for chairs: cheerleader for faculty at all ranks, including non-tenure track instructors or research faculty; conflict mediator; advocate for the faculty to the upper administration; mentor to peers; supervisor of office staff; and the voice and face of the department (Aziz, Mullins Blazer, Grauer, Burnfield, & Lodato, 2005; Diamond, 1996; Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, 1993; Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, & Beach, 2006; Wilson, 2001; Wolverton, Gmelch, & Sorenson, 1998).

Several studies have attempted to capture the many responsibilities required of chairs with the number of tasks identified ranging wildly from 18 to 97 (Aziz et al., 2005; Benoit, Graham & Heiman, 2002; Seagren et al., 1993; Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt, 2005). These tasks vary in complexity, from budgeting and planning activities to legal issues to providing support to faculty in the department (Aziz et al., 2005; Seagren et al., 1993; Wolverton et al., 2005). From the mundane to the critical, the department chair faces many issues on a daily basis: "Their days are consumed by dealing with recalcitrant faculty members, fighting for resources, shuffling an incredible amount of paperwork, and coping with an ever-expanding array of personal problems that professors and staff members bring to the office" (Wilson, 2001, p. A10). Gmelch and Miskin (2004) describe an average day for a department chair: 47% participating in scheduled meetings and another 22% in unscheduled meetings, 15% spent doing desk work, 9% dedicated to office hours and 6% talking on the telephone. With nearly 70% of the day spent in meetings, there is little time left to deal with the daily responsibilities of being chair including administrative details such as paperwork, memo writing, and budgetary decisions, as well as their professional interests in teaching and research.

Wolverton, Gmelch, and Sorenson (1998) developed a framework describing what they argue are the four pivotal roles that chairs must play: 1) *faculty developer*, responsible for the recruitment of new faculty and supporting the research, teaching and services efforts of all the faculty, 2) *manager*, responsible for the day-to-day needs of the department, with an emphasis on financial issues, 3) *scholar*, the time and attention paid to one's own area of research, and 4) *leader*, the most difficult role for chairs to define for themselves and, as the authors cite, the one that "often gets summarily ignored" (p. 210). While this framework serves as a useful tool for understanding the essential functions of a department chair, it is clear that chairs have such wide-ranging roles and responsibilities that it is difficult to quantify them effectively or completely. Fortunately, despite the broad and seemingly endless range of responsibilities, most department leaders understand the importance and essential nature of their role and believe that they have influence over the future directions of their department and the campus (Whitson & Hubert, 1982).

Issues of Significance Facing Chairs

Having explored the roles that chairs play in an academic organization, it is important to further examine the struggles they experience. Being a chair is often viewed as the most difficult administrative role, as chairs typically have limited ability to reward positive contributions by faculty or to discourage detrimental behavior, and little training to know what to do and how to do it. Chairs also tend to find themselves in the difficult position of having to balance both their faculty and administrative responsibilities, in addition to their personal lives.

Lack of Preparation and Training

Faculty members are not typically groomed for leadership opportunities (Strathe & Wilson, 2006). Indeed, the very nature of academia is solitary and personal, with an emphasis on disciplinary distinctions; faculty members are socialized from the early days of graduate school to continually specialize and narrow their research focus (Austin, 2002). Professors, especially those at the assistant and associate ranks, are often not encouraged to look beyond the larger scope of their research. As Gmelch (2002a) points out, “We promulgate [this situation] in higher education, socializing and rewarding our new Ph.D.s to become internationally renowned experts in narrow fields and then complain that no one is willing, nor prepared to be a generalist and serve in a leadership capacity” (p. 2).

Research on faculty development issues is plentiful and universities often place a heavy emphasis on faculty development at all levels, but even more so for pre-tenure faculty (Olsen & Sorcinelli, 1992; Sorcinelli et al., 2006). Hecht (2004), however, points out that it is only in the recent past that greater emphasis has been placed on the professional development of department chairs. Most institutions of higher education do not provide management and leadership training for chairs (Gmelch, 2002a; Hecht, 2004, 2006; Seagren et al., 1993). As Gmelch and Miskin (2004) note, “few universities and colleges have systematic training for their academic leaders and of the more than 2,000 academic leaders we have surveyed, only 3 percent have department chair development programs in their universities” (p. 7). Furthermore, Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy and Beach (2006) found that “over one-quarter (27%) of faculty developers indicated that support of departmental leadership was one of the top three challenges facing their institutions, and it was deemed a significant challenge by developers at all types of institutions” (p. 122). Recent studies have demonstrated that, as the role of department chair has expanded, the need to develop training programs to support and prepare new department chairs is essential to ensuring their success (Aziz et al., 2005; Wolverton et al., 2005).

Gmelch (2002a) strongly advocates for a greater emphasis on academic leadership issues: "The academic leader is the least studied and most misunderstood management position in America. The preparation of academic leaders takes time, training, commitment, and expertise" (p. 1). National organizations, such as the American Council on Education and the Council of Independent Colleges, now offer training programs for new chairs and several universities offer annual national conferences targeted to department heads and chairs (Hecht, 2004). Collaborative efforts, such as the Academic Leadership Program by the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (comprised of the Big Ten universities and the University of Chicago), have resulted in intense multi-day workshops that are designed to augment campus-based initiatives. Hecht (2006) counsels new chairs to "gain some mastery at two different levels: getting to know your institution and learning about the literature of department chair leadership" (p. 14). Wolverton, Ackerman and Holt (2005) found that faculty members who participated in a yearlong pilot program to prepare them for a future role as department chair greatly benefited from the program, even those who withdrew after realizing that they were simply not ready to take on the difficult duties of chair. These faculty members, despite not finishing the program, did appreciate and acknowledge that going through the training process made them stronger faculty leaders. Other participants experienced an increased level of confidence in their ability to be an effective departmental leader.

While the results of this study demonstrate the impact that leadership training can have, unfortunately many universities and colleges do not offer formal programs that afford these opportunities to new chairs (Gmelch, 2002a, 2002b). There are a few notable exceptions; the Executive Leadership Program at Michigan State University which offers campus administrators the opportunity to attend national leadership programs and provides monthly networking sessions; the University of Minnesota's Department Chairs Leadership program, a year-long program covering topics critical to a department leader's role; and the University of Washington's Center for Institutional Change, funded by the National Science Foundation.

In one of the few empirical studies to examine department chair transitions and socialization, Gmelch and Parkay (1999) conducted in-depth and ongoing interviews with 13 new department chairs at ten different institutions across the country. This study highlights the absolute lack of training and development provided to new chairs and the difficulties that such a situation causes for the chairs. Gmelch and Parkay conclude that instituting specific purposeful programs might allow new chairs to have a smoother transition. They recommend that such programs could include formal and informal mentoring initiatives, time and stress management workshops, and, most importantly, leadership training and management workshops so that they can develop the skills necessary to be a successful department chair.

In addition to their lack of awareness or experience beyond their own academic specialty, another difficulty facing new chairs is a lack of knowledge about leadership models and theories. This void of leadership knowledge – and support for department chairs – is viewed as a critical problem at many institutions. Birnbaum (1988) contends that it is important for leaders to understand leadership theories and to be able to view situations through the lenses of different leadership frameworks. He argues that having the capacity and ability to use multiple perspectives produces a stronger and more effective leader. Department chairs, having been teachers and researchers throughout their career, are often not educated in leadership theories and walk blindly into situations lacking the appropriate tools to guide their way. One notable program trying to address this issue is the Academic Leadership Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where emerging leaders spend a semester learning about leadership theories. Another interesting example is the University of Michigan's Leading Excellence program in which all newly promoted full professors are invited to participate so that they gain a broader perspective and understanding of the university: "The goal is to instill a greater sense of responsibility in full professors, who can be role models for the younger professors and leaders within the institution" (Wilson, 2008b, p. B7).

The Changing Nature of the Role of the Chair

How department leadership is cultivated and supported helps to define the environment in which faculty members live and work. As higher education has evolved, so too has the role of department chair. More decision-making power resides at the departmental level, thrusting the chair into an increasingly more essential leadership role rather than acting simply as a manager. In recent years, the changes in higher education as a whole have left department chairs in a tenuous position: having greater authority and responsibility but scarcely any idea of how to use it (Gmelch & Parkay, 1999).

Furthermore, recent demands for greater accountability are eroding freedoms associated with and guided by shared governance (Altbach, 1999). Increasing calls by taxpayers, state and federal legislators, and students for institutions to be more proactive in meeting the needs of the nation, individual states, and students have placed tremendous pressure on higher education as a whole (Altbach, 1999). Constituents are demanding that faculty members and their institutions be held accountable for individual faculty workloads and student learning outcomes, among other issues. Faculty members are increasingly being asked to justify how they spend their time and institutional leaders are being grilled at legislative hearings. As Lucas (1994) points out, "such skepticism about the value of what faculty do has resulted in interventions from outside the academy that have left higher education in a state of disequilibrium" (p. 4). In this current, more hostile environment, the chairs take on greater importance as protectors of their faculty and as the public face of their department (Seagren et al., 1993). Lucas further argues that the general public's growing uneasiness towards the faculty places greater pressure on and increases the visibility of departmental leaders. She argues,

> When we add to these issues the necessity for the chair to attend to the orienting and mentoring of new faculty and the continuing needs of more experienced faculty members…we see just how essential it is for department chairs to exercise creative, proactive leadership…Because academic chairs are the leaders most intimately connected with the heart of their institutions, namely the quality of teaching and learning, they have the potential for the greatest impact. (p. 5)

As external pressures have increased and higher education continues to evolve to meet the demands of modern society, departmental leadership has taken on greater importance (Lucas, 1994) and well-prepared chairs continue to be an integral piece of the solution.

Role Ambiguity as a Stressor for Chairs

Among the many challenges facing department leaders are the multiple demands from both members of the department's faculty and the institution's administration, ambiguous role identity, and a vague position description (Gmelch, 2002a; Thomas & Schuh, 2004; Whitson & Hubert, 1982; Wolverton, Gmelch, Wolverton & Sarros, 1999). Research has focused on the multiple demands and ambiguous role identities that chairs face, a situation that can easily confound even the most confident of new department chairs (Gmelch, 2002a; Thomas & Schuh, 2004; Whitson & Hubert, 1982; Wolverton et al., 1999).

Department chairs at institutions of higher education often find themselves in an unenviable position: on the first step of the academic administrative ladder and yet still a member of the faculty. Chairs must carefully walk the line between being a member of the faculty and being a member of the administration. With these conflicting roles, how do department chairs know for whom do they speak and advocate? Successful chairs "swivel" (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004, p. 75) between audiences, portraying the same message but using different voices and tones depending on with whom they are speaking (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004). In addition, there is not a clear delineation of their role as chair, as Seagren, Creswell, and Wheeler (1993) note: "Chairs suffer from role ambiguity because they have no clear mandate for their position. They seldom are supplied with clear job descriptions or clear criteria for performing their jobs" (p. 11).

Furthermore, chairs often want to continue those activities that brought them to the profession originally: research, scholarship, and teaching. Indeed, "65 percent [of department chairs] return to faculty status immediately after their service" (Seagren et al., 1993, p. 14). Maintaining their faculty identity, while also fulfilling their administrative duties, often means a carefully choreographed juggling act; the multitasking typically continues while a chair also tries to balance a personal life and caring for family members, both young and old (Seagren et al., 1993).

All of these issues make the role of department chair that much more difficult. Gmelch and Burns (1994) extensively studied the stress that academic chairs contend with and argue that much of that anxiety stems from role ambiguity and conflict inherent in the position. As Gmelch and Parkay (1999) note, the stress of serving as a department chair can have a detrimental effect on both mental and physical health, a situation that can cause harm to a department. Having to be everything to everybody takes its toll on chairs and is one of the greatest stresses that chairs cite (Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Tucker, 1992). Finding balance between professional and personal lives can also prove difficult for chairs, whose work is seemingly never done (Gmelch, 2002a). These pressures might lead to what seems to be a brief average tenure of six years for department chairs (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Seagren et al., 1993). However, given that other administrators have a relatively similar average length of time in their positions – three to five years for deans (Jacobson, 2002) and six to eight years for presidents (Padilla & Ghosh, 2000) – the stresses of academic administration are clearly not unique to department chairs.

Chairs face a challenging path, selected for a leadership role but often not prepared for the demands that will be placed upon them or the ambiguity in their role that they will endure. As higher education answers calls for accountability and works to meet the needs of twenty-first century students, it is critical for institutions to provide more support for those in academic administration. By preparing and training chairs in leadership, institutions can build a pool of leaders from which to draw future university and college presidents, provosts and deans.

<u>Leadership Development – or Lack Thereof – in Higher Education</u>

At colleges and universities, professional development activities emphasize the values and norms that are central to an academic discipline as opposed to higher education in general. Graduate students in chemistry learn how to conduct bench science in accordance with accepted disciplinary standards, while anthropologists study ethnographic methods as a tool for understanding different cultures. Future faculty members are molded by the practices of their discipline because of the concerted efforts of the discipline to educate the next generation of researchers, scholars, and educators. There is, unfortunately, little emphasis placed on developing future leaders (Bisbee & Miller, 2006; Gmelch, 2002a; Land, 2003; Katsinas & Kempner, 2005), and as an expected wave of retirements draws nearer (Katsinas & Kempner, 2005), the lack of a cadre of prepared leaders looms large. The importance of leadership development cannot be understated: "Replacing effective leaders with effective leaders requires a commitment from the institution to identity potential leaders and provide support and training" (Bisbee & Miller, 2006, p. 13).

Resistance to Leadership Development

In the corporate world, ambition is not only valued, it is often rewarded with promotions and financial gain. As a result, heavy emphasis is placed on leadership development programs and succession planning (Bisbee & Miller, 2006) to nurture and feed those ambitions. Corporate culture often dictates the need for aggressive programs to identify and train potential leaders, sometimes even for college graduates who are recruited into management training programs right out of school. Higher education, on the other hand, often retreats from such obvious ambition (Gmelch, 2004; Kauffman, 1990). Faculty members interested in obtaining administrative roles tend to be more successful if they act reluctant to take on such responsibility. As Kauffman (1990) notes, faculty members "who seek such posts too aggressively are viewed with suspicion" (p. 100). This aversion to individual ambition serves to limit the pool of potential leaders by making faculty reluctant to put their name forward for leadership roles. In addition, the ability of an institution to provide training and leadership education to potential chairs, deans, and other senior administrators is severely impacted by the general resistance to individual promotion into positions of leadership (Gmelch, 2002; Gmelch, 2004). As Hoppe (2003) points out,

> In higher education, the academic leadership pipeline has historically flowed from a department…rotational system, with little or no succession planning. Until recently, senior faculty willing to do their share of administrative work simply took a turn as department chair and then returned (relieved and often disillusioned) to their tenured professorial role. Today, increasing numbers are unwilling to take their turn, and too few are eager to volunteer for administrative roles. (p. 3)

The Draw of Faculty Life

Graduate students are often drawn to an academic career by a desire to conduct research, shape young minds, and enjoy a community and culture that supports thoughtful endeavors and intellectual stimulation (Gmelch, 2002a, 2002b). Faculty members enjoy autonomy in their professional life that is rarely seen in other occupations (Gmelch, 2002a, 200b). They set their own schedules, conduct research on issues of their own choosing, and can feel as if they have no boss (Wilson, 2008a). This lifestyle and professional independence is often lost when faculty members step into administrative roles. New administrators must negotiate a transition from an almost total control over their daily schedule to one where they have almost no control (Gmelch, 2002a, 2002b).

One recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* describes how one department chair lost his position because the dean insisted that it was the department chair's responsibility to be at his desk each day from 8 am to 5 pm (Wilson, 2008a). While this is an extreme example, many administrators find that their time and their schedule is no longer theirs to own. This loss of autonomy can be a strong deterrent to a faculty member's ambitions and interest in seeking leadership roles.

No Natural Career Path in Higher Education

One of the reasons that the corporate sector has more success with leadership development programs is that there are often typical career paths that people follow to become a chief executive officer or other senior executive (Clunies, 2007). The many possible entries to a leadership career path provide convenient opportunities to gain an understanding of what it means to be a leader and to obtain the necessary skills to be successful. In higher education, recent studies have shown that there is no similar career path on the way to a presidency (Land, 2003; McDade, 1987). While Cohen and March's 1974 seminal work on the career trajectories of university presidents and chancellors proposed a five-step career ladder (in ascending order, faculty member, department chair, dean, provost, president), later research by Moore, Salimbene, Marlier, and Bragg (1983) found that being a dean or department chair was not as pivotal in the presidential career path as once thought and that other administrative positions could easily be substituted. Moore et al. contend "more individuals conform to variations from the 'norms' than to the 'norms' themselves" (p. 514).

Faculty members do not typically begin their careers with aspirations of becoming a department chair. In fact, serving as department chair is often viewed as either a temporary role or simply testing the academic administrative career waters (Moore et al., 1983). Often, department chairs are plucked internally from the department, no matter their preparation for the role. As Wolverton et al. (2005) describe, "academic departments reach into their faculty pools and with little forethought or planning insert some unsuspecting target into this critical leadership position" (p. 227). In fact, there is generally little or no rhyme or reason to the way departments select new chairs. There are different models for what procedures departments or institutions follow when choosing a new leader (Tucker, 1992). Some departments expect that all faculty members will take their turn as chair (Hoppe, 2003). Some have leaders who lead their departments for 15 or more years. Other departments hire chairs through competitive, national searches. The nature of the selection process can influence the expectations that a department places upon its leader.

The transient nature of the role of a department chair may be one of the reasons why little attention is paid to the preparation and training of incoming chairs. The lack of a clear and straightforward career path – and the individual viewpoint that the role may simply be a stop on the academic administrative career track – limits the opportunities to identify potential leaders and proactively provide leadership development programs.

As Hoppe (2003) notes, a great deal of research has focused on the traits and characteristics needed to be a leader. There is no consensus around leadership studies and yet, as Bisbee and Miller (2006) note, "if there is no forethought in what type of leaders might be needed and what skills might be needed, hiring the right person to influence change and achieve institutional goals becomes a matter of luck" (p. 24). Faculty members who are considering taking on an administrative leadership role can test the waters by volunteering to chair departmental or institutional committees, taking on visible assignments in the shared governance system, or serving in critical roles in the department, such as graduate program director. This also allows the institution the opportunity to see what skills and potential that faculty members possess.

Gmelch (2002a) argues that there are ways for faculty members to take on leadership roles without appearing as if to only be considering their own individual advancement: “It is imperative that those who seek academic administrative posts of advancement articulate that their fidelity is to the central purposes of their colleges and universities and to the values of scholars and learners” (p. 100). This will allow their peers to feel as if they seek to advance the university, and not simply their personal career. Lees (2006) argues that current chairs, looking forward to when they step down, should carefully and strategically provide these opportunities for their faculty peers so that there are faculty members ready to take on new challenges. Yet, there is little empirical evidence that this occurs with any regularity or forethought.

Planning for Leadership Succession

Given the difficult and diverse challenges that department chairs face and their overwhelming lack of preparation for the job, it is essential for institutions to think about ways to plan for transitions in leadership at the department level. The issue of leader succession is critical to any organization (Green & McDade, 1991; Kesner & Sebora, 1994), as the process and transition can impact the organization in a variety of ways. Leadership succession is most often studied at or near the top of an organizational chart, whether it is in the context of a corporate leader or a K-12 principal. It can be argued that this is because it is easier to isolate the impact of a single person with the highest level of authority than the work of people at lower echelons with more limited responsibility and authority. The research on leader succession outside of higher education is varied, with little consensus on the impact of leadership change on an organization (Hart, 1991; Kesner & Sebora, 1994). Birnbaum (1989) contends that one of the limitations of succession research broadly is the lack of clarity when examining performance measures. Often these measures are ambiguous and subject to different interpretations by different constituencies and this has had an impact on research in this area. As Birnbaum explains,

> Because of the difficulty of obtaining reliable and valid measures of performance in many organizational settings, much of the research has been done using athletic teams for which performance records are unequivocal. For that reason we have more empirical data about the effects of managerial changes in professional sports than we do about changes of leaders in business firms or in institutions of higher education. (p. 124)

Within higher education, succession research has emphasized the role of the president and the impact of presidential change on a university or college (Birnbaum, 1988, 1989; Levin, 1998; Moore & Burrows, 2001). Department chairs, as discussed earlier, hold a unique position in the organization as the leader of a unit comprised of independent and self-driven faculty members, while also serving the institution, one might argue, as a middle manager. Despite the critical nature of the department chair's role, there has been little or no research conducted on succession planning, or even the succession process, among department chairs.

The nature of the chair's position is transitional to some extent, given the six-year average tenure in the role. With each change in leadership, the department and the institution must adjust and react to a new chair. It is, however, unclear the extent to which institutions of higher education think about or plan for succession of department chairs. As Hargreaves (2005) notes, "one of the most significant events in the life of a school is a change in its leadership. Yet few things in education succeed less than leadership succession" (p. 163). Writings on department chairs tend to be how-to guides, offering practical advice on how to transition into the role (Hecht, 2004, 2006). As Gmelch and Parkay (1999) contend, there is simply very little research in this area: "Although several books and research studies have focused on various facets of *being* a department chair, little is known about how professors *become* a chair" (p. 1). There is, interestingly enough, increasing attention being paid to the way in which department chairs transition out of the role at the end of their tenure, as they once again become a full-fledged faculty member in the department (Smith, 2004; Tucker, 1992).

Research on the succession of leaders – in the corporate and secondary education sectors and at higher levels in higher education– can provide a framework for examining chair succession. As noted earlier, the corporate sector has long recognized the importance of planning for leadership transition, although the dramatic differences in culture limit the ability to translate findings to higher education. University and college presidents, while a player in the same organizational culture as chairs, have a very different process for leader succession and contend with issues which are far more global than those facing chairs. Finally, another source of information is the research on K-12 principals, who face a number of surprisingly similar challenges to academic department chairs.

Succession of CEOs in the Corporate Sector

Corporations have long thought about leadership succession, typically at the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) level. This critical leadership role is ultimately responsible for not just the well-being of a company, but also the public's perception of that company.

As Kesner and Sebora (1994) note, "the CEO is the agent who is ultimately responsible and accountable for action on and reaction to an organization's strategy, design, performance, and environment" (p. 328). The CEO serves as the face of the company to shareholders, analysts, and the general public. Corporations have recognized the critical nature of this appointment and have implemented leadership programs to cultivate potential executives early on in their careers (Parry & Procter-Thomson, 2003).

Kesner and Sebora (1994) provide an overview of the abundant research on CEO succession and its impact on an organization. They identify three distinct categories in the history of such research: 1) the initial emergence of research in this area, 2) the creation of theoretical foundations and early empirical investigations and 3) an explosion of research in this area in recent years. Despite the plethora of research in this area, the notion of CEO succession and what it means for a corporation remains unclear and it is difficult to find consensus among leadership scholars.

Despite the vastly different cultures of higher education and the corporate world, there are some similarities between the experiences of department chair and chief executive officer. For one, as compensation for CEOs continues to climb and more corporations are hit with scandals, shareholders, employees and the general public have made increasing demands for greater accountability (Valor, 2005). In recent years, institutions of higher education have been under the same scrutiny that the corporate sector is now experiencing (Altbach, 1999). Secondly, while CEOs admittedly have far greater influence and authority than department chairs, they are responsible to their boards of directors, and for publicly held companies, shareholders, just as department chairs must report to deans and other senior administrators. Finally, the position description for a chief executive officer can be as vague as that of a department chair. As Kesner and Sebora (1994) note, “the job [of CEO] is idiosyncratic, nonroutine, and unstructured” (p. 329). Department chairs often voice similar sentiments about the ambiguity of their own role (Gmelch & Parkay, 1999).

There are, however, important differences that render comparison between corporate executive and academic department chair succession nearly impossible. CEOs do have more power than department chairs, typically because they have more control over financial decisions. Wilson (2001) argues that department chairs have even less power than a typical middle manager in the corporate world, since chairs “cannot force their faculty members to do anything” (p. A10). In addition, the vastly different cultures of higher education and the corporate world prevent fair comparison between the two leadership roles. Birnbaum (1988), in his exploration of the hiring process of university colleges and presidents, took care to compare such planning in higher education to that of the corporate world. He concluded that the two processes vary so drastically, with higher education institutions conducting thorough, inclusive and often open search processes for new presidents, while corporate leaders often expect to handpick their own successors. While little CEO succession research is translatable to that of department chairs, it is clear that corporations have made leadership development a priority. Institutions of higher education should pay attention to the lesson learned by corporations; it is critical to cultivate a corps of future leaders in order to be prepared for the eventual turnover in key positions: “After having accepted succession as an inevitable and dramatic event that shapes the future of firms, it seemed natural to recognize the importance of planning for this event” (Kesner & Sebora, 1994, p. 359-360).

Succession of Presidents in the Higher Education Sector

In universities and colleges, it is the president who sits at the top of the organizational chart. Similar to the writings available to new department chairs, recent books have provided practical advice for new presidents (Moore & Burrows, 2001). A small number of research studies have focused on the potential impact that a president – and a change in presidents – can have on an institution (Birnbaum, 1988, 1989; Levin, 1998). Birnbaum's (1988) work lays the foundation for examining the president's role in an institution, as determined by the extensive search process. By looking at how the search for a president forces an institution to examine its core values, Birnbaum argues that, in the end, it is not the actual selection of a president that is so critical, but the search process itself. The broad nature of searches provides participants with a sense – whether real or perceived – of control and influence over the direction of the institution. In the end, however, Birnbaum stresses that the extensive nature of the search process does not equate to the impact such a change in leadership can have on an institution. Indeed, Birnbaum contends,

> It may be argued that the investment of so much time and energy in search processes is justified because presidential selection is critical to the effective functioning of the organization. However, it can also be proposed that the search process in higher education is long and labored not because presidents are instrumentally so important, but because they are not. (p. 505)

Birnbaum (1989) continued his research on the role of presidents by examining more closely the act of presidential succession – as opposed to simply the search process – and its impact on the institution. In setting the stage for his research, Birnbaum describes several critical limitations to leadership succession impact studies: 1) the determination of which performance measures to address must be made carefully so as to be able to gain an understanding of leader impact, 2) the impact of leader change can take years to materialize and might not be immediately evident or identifiable, 3) it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to isolate what changes are attributable to leader succession as opposed to other influences, 4) institutional performance could be related to the predecessor as opposed to the successor, and 5) as best seen with athletic teams, "an organization's performance may deteriorate as part of a temporary change beyond its control – an outcome that for an athletic team might be referred to as a 'slump'" (p. 125). While it is important to take note of these limitations, Birnbaum's work does indeed shed light on institutional leadership and succession.

Utilizing the Institutional Functioning Inventory (IFI), a tool developed by the Educational Testing Service, Birnbaum (1989) sought to determine faculty perceptions of the impact of institutional leadership change. The IFI instrument assesses organization performance related to a variety of measures including but not limited to: academic freedom for faculty and students, planning and institutional research, the role of shared governance, and the diversity of the student and faculty bodies. The IFI was distributed to a sample of faculty at 93 institutions between 1968 and 1970 and again, to a "similar sample of faculty" (p. 126) between 1980 and 1981. A methodological limitation that Birnbaum acknowledges from the outset is that the IFI was not designed to measure the impact of leadership change and that any significant differences in the surveys might be explained by other factors. He concluded that there was very little change that could be attributed to either presidential change or stability, although he is very quick to point out that this does not negate the critical importance of the role of the president: "Complex social organizations cannot function effectively over the long term without leaders to coordinate their activities, represent them to their various publics, and symbolize the embodiment of institutional purpose" (p. 131-132).

Levin (1998) voiced concern that Birnbaum's work used only faculty perceptions to determine the impact of presidential succession, thus presenting a very one-sided analysis. In an effort to provide a more balanced view of the impact of leadership change on an institution, Levin used a multi-faceted approach to examine the impact of presidential succession at community colleges. By interviewing the president, vice presidents, deans, and faculty at five community colleges, Levin was able to gain a broader understanding of the impact of presidential succession. Levin focused on institutional culture as a measure of the impact of presidential succession and found that there is a perception of change that becomes associated with an individual president "when the change forces involved are actually more complex" (p. 418). It should be noted, however, that institutional culture and expectations, as well as the president's role, at community colleges might differ than those of research universities or private institutions and thus Levin's work might be limited in its ability to be generalized to other types of institutions.

While research on university and colleges presidents helps to shed light on the succession phenomenon, comparison to the role of and succession among department chairs, in the end, proves nearly impossible. University presidents enjoy much greater autonomy to make decisions and are further removed from those who are impacted by those decisions. Department chairs interact every day with the faculty in their department and will, more than likely, return to the faculty one day. Due in large part to their proximity to faculty peers, chairs have a capacity for a much larger impact, although on a smaller scale, than that of a president. Through hiring, tenure and promotion, and curriculum decisions, chairs have the ability to directly affect the lives of faculty in the department, while the president's impact, removed in many ways from the everyday functions of the university, can appear to be more limited.

Succession Among K-12 Principals

Recent research studies examining the role of succession planning among K-12 principals provide insights into this phenomenon in an education setting with both similarities to and differences from that of higher education. Surprisingly, the position of principal is not that different than the one played by department heads at colleges and universities. Principals are close to their constituents and interact with them – the teachers in the school, the students, and their parents – on a very regular basis. So too are department chairs. When chairs make decisions, they are not then sequestered away in another building across campus. Indeed, the person they just said "no" to might be in an office just across the hallway. Principals and department chairs are both forced to make decisions that impact the daily lives of their colleagues. The proximity that chairs and principals have to their faculties has the potential to place both chairs and principals in a vulnerable position.

Another similarity is that both principals and chairs are middle managers, although not in the corporate sense of the word – having people and decisions that they are responsible for, and yet, they merely report to another layer of administration. For chairs, they are between the faculty and the dean and must carefully balance the needs of both in order to be most successful (Gmelch & Parkay, 1999). Principals are responsible for the daily lives of their teachers and students but ultimately report to the superintendent. While principals have more authority over their faculty than chairs, they do not have total authority.

Although selection processes are influenced by geographic region and institutional culture, there can be similarities in how K-12 principals and department chairs are selected. For department chairs, while there are different processes, often faculty members take turns serving as chair (Wolverton et al., 2005). Those with administrative experience and inclination are asked to serve as what Birnbaum titled "first among equals" (1988, p. 89). It is rare that departments choose to recruit a chair from outside of the campus, although it seems to be happening with more frequency as the changing nature of the position demands a more professional administrator (Wilson, 2001). While principals are most often recruited through regional or national search processes, there are some school districts that have forced rotation among principals at the schools in the district (Fink & Brayman, 2004, 2006). The knowledge that the position includes a revolving door can color the tenure of any chair or principal, when they – and their constituents know – that their time is limited. Overall, Fink and Brayman (2006) found that,

> The rapid turnover of school leaders and principals especially creates significant barriers to educational change. If principals are viewed…as merely interchangeable messengers of agents external to the school, then the kind of leadership required for long-tem sustained enhancement of learning for all students will remain cruelly elusive. (p. 86)

Turnover in department chairs can have the same detrimental effect, not necessarily on the students, but certainly on the faculty and the institution.

The similarities between K-12 principals and department chairs have provided a framework for previous research on department leadership. In looking at the transformation that faculty members undergo when they become department chairs, Gmelch and Parkay (1999) cleverly adapt research on the socialization of new principals in K-12 institutions. While they demonstrate how principals face transitions similar to department chairs, it is critical to note the limitations of this comparison. For instance, school principals and chairs have vastly different levels of power and authority. School principals are responsible for entire schools and report only to a superintendent, although they must also meet the needs of the students and their parents (Fink & Brayman, 2004). Department chairs, while they are responsible for their own department, must learn to operate within school/college and institutional environments (Plater, 2006). Chairs report to deans who, going up the administrative ladder, report to provosts, chancellors and then presidents and boards of trustees. The hierarchy is much deeper and chairs are lower on the administrative ladder than school principals, given the layers of higher education administration.

School principals and department chairs also have different constituencies that they must please and "enjoy" different levels of visibility within a community. Principals interact with students, faculty and parents, and may even live in the community where they work. An unhappy parent group can make life intolerable for a principal, sometimes by simply going to the local newspaper. On the other hand, department chairs tend to live in relative obscurity, except to the faculty members in the department. Typically, the president of the institution is the face of the institution (Moore & Burrows, 2001), not the department chair. All of these factors can have an impact on the decisions that chairs and principals make and thus influence their experiences and socialization to their new leadership roles in different ways. In the absence of extensive research on succession planning for department leaders, the comparison to principals – just like that of corporate leaders and university presidents – is helpful but inadequate.

Conclusion

Department chairs have difficult yet critical positions in the hierarchy of higher education. Far too little research has been conducted on the succession planning that takes place at the department chair level. Yet, the existing literature on leadership development suggests that organizations should pay attention to these issues and provide support to current and future leaders. In addition, previous research on the succession of corporate CEOs, university and college presidents, and K-12 principals is not easily translatable to the unique roles played by department chairs. Closer examination of the succession planning process that takes place at the departmental level will provide a better understanding of the needs of future department chairs and will fill a critical void in higher education research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Previous research on department chairs has identified both the significance of their role (Benoit, Graham, & Heiman, 2002; Gmelch, 2002a; Lees, 2006; Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, 1993; Tucker, 1992) and the difficulties typically faced by department chairs (Gmelch, 2002a, 2004; Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Gmelch & Parkay, 1999; Seagren et al., 1993; Wolverton, Gmelch, & Sorenson, 1999). What is missing from the current literature is a deeper understanding of the succession process among department chairs. The goal of this study was to generate new knowledge and greater clarity by conducting in-depth interviews with current chairs to find out how they think about the future leadership of their departments. This chapter first presents a conceptual framework, which will provide a context for how the research was conducted, followed by a description of the research design including methodology, data collection, and analysis. Finally, the efforts to enhance trustworthiness and the limitations inherent in this multiple case study are explored.

Conceptual Framework

The pressures and challenges that face department chairs are well documented: lack of training and preparation (Aziz, Mullins, Balzer, Grauer, Burnfield, & Lodato, 2005; Gmelch, 2002a; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Gmelch & Parkay, 1999; Hecht, 2004, 2006; Seagren et al., 1993; Strathe & Wilson, 2006; Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt, 2005); scheduling demands (Gmelch, 2002a; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Wilson, 2008a), conflict (Lees, 2006; Seagren et al., 1993; Tucker, 1992), and perhaps the most stressful, role ambiguity (Gmelch, 2002a, 2002b, 2004; Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Seagren et al., 1993; Thomas & Schuh, 2004; Whitson & Hubert, 1982; Wolverton et al., 1999). These stresses are often in addition to those that the typical faculty member faces, including pressure to secure grants, publish articles and books, teach effectively, and provide service to the department, institution and discipline. As Gmelch (1991) notes, “while [department chairs] seem to retain many of the highest faculty stressors while in the chair position, they also add the *managerial* stressors of confrontation with colleagues, additional time demands, and institutional constraints” (p. 47).

The challenges that chairs experience by not having a clearly defined position and by being pulled in many differing directions cannot be summarily dismissed (Seagren et al., 1993; Tucker, 1992). While Gmelch (1992) argues that some stress can increase productivity, excessive stress inevitably leads to burnout: “After all, [department chairs] can only put out so many brush fires before burning out. It is at this point that stress becomes a most powerful and elusive enemy” (p. 9). Excessive stress is often the primary cause of the high turnover rate typically seen at the department level (Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Tucker, 1992). As Gmelch (1991) states, “nearly 80,000 scholars currently serve as department chairs and almost one quarter will need to be replaced each year” (p. 1). It is because of this high turnover rate that leadership succession takes on even greater importance for a department. In their examination of the longevity of university presidents and the impact of leadership transitions on an institution, Padilla and Ghosh (2000) argue that, “with frequent turnover, periods of discontinuity tend to multiply, which weakens leadership on campus and relocates vital decisions and initiatives off campus" (p. 37). The same holds true for departments; constant leadership turnover leaves a department vulnerable to mandates from higher up in the academic hierarchy.

In thinking about leadership succession for department chairs, the issue of role ambiguity – and the lack of a concrete and prevailing position description – provides the conceptual framework for this study. The role and expectations of a department chair vary from institution to institution and discipline to discipline (Green & McDade, 1991; Seagren et al., 1993; Tucker, 1992). In any given department, it is the current department chair who is in the best position to understand what kind of leadership the department will need in the future. It is the department chair who benefits from meetings with deans and other chairs which allow them to understand the larger picture of what is happening on campus or what political maneuvers might be in play. It is the department chair who has full knowledge of the budget, personnel issues, and staffing. Chairs have a more complete understanding of the department than do faculty members, and so it is the department chair who must think about the future leadership for the department and then, perhaps, plan accordingly. As Lees (2006) notes, "it is incumbent on the sitting chair to groom a successor so that a prepared and experienced individual will be able to step in and keep the department moving forward" (p. 313). Chairs don't tend to stay chairs forever; it is the current department chair who must prepare the department for his/her eventual exit from the role.

In order to be effective, department chair succession should be an intentional process, one that takes into account the challenges and opportunities in a given department, in addition to the human resources available (Bisbee & Miller, 2006). It is the uniqueness of each department chair's experiences that forces the succession process to be intentional and individualized to a specific department at a specific institution. While there may be similarities among challenges and responsibilities for department chairs in different departments, each department must contend with individual faculty personalities, student issues, and disciplinary norms. This means that, despite the thousands of departments at institutions across the country, no two department leaders have exactly the same experience while chair. It also means that leadership development – the preparation of the future leaders – should be a critical piece of the succession planning process (Gmelch, 2002a, 2002b; Green & McDade, 1991; Lees, 2006). It is through this lens that this study examines department chair succession. By focusing on the uniqueness of each instance of department chair succession, it is possible to not only gain a clearer understanding of how individual chairs address the issue but to also determine if there are common themes that cross departmental and disciplinary boundaries.

Research Questions

The primary research question this study seeks to answer is: how do department chairs think about their own succession? Potential sub-questions include but are not limited to: Is the succession planning thought process influenced by the current chair's own transition to the position, and if so, to what extent? Are there obstacles to succession planning? How do disciplinary differences impact succession planning? Do current chairs work with their faculty to develop a succession plan?

A Qualitative Case Study

The goal of this study is to gain greater knowledge and a deeper understanding of the planning process used when preparing for a leadership transition at the department level. Such a study demands close examination of the thought process used by individual chairs as they plan for the future leadership of their department. Merriam (1998) states, "qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding" (p. 8). It is only through the use of qualitative research techniques that the nuances of actions and plans can be explored in a way that sheds light on this critical planning process.

Yin (2003) argues that three conditions determine research strategy: "(a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events" (p. 5). By exploring each of these conditions closely, it is clear that this study demands a case study approach. First, Yin contends that studies aimed at exploring how and why certain phenomena occur – as opposed to the prevalence or frequency of such phenomena – should be designed as and considered a case study, a history, or an experiment. Merriam (1998) supports this condition, arguing that a "case study is a particular suitable design if you are interested in process" (p. 33). Secondly, Yin argues that, in an experiment, the researcher plays a role in the study, either through the establishment of a controlled environment, such as a laboratory, where the "focus [is] on one or two isolated variables" (p. 8), or in a field study where control and variable groups are determined and each is treated differently. In Yin's approach, case studies and histories both reflect a lack of involvement in or control over the behavior of the subjects. It is through the distinction of time – the third condition posed by Yin – that case studies and histories are differentiated. Histories seek to answer questions through the use of documents, while case studies happen in the present, allowing for direct observation without any influence over the behaviors being examined.

This study clearly meets Yin's (2003) definition of a case study. By examining the thought process behind department chair succession planning, the study seeks to answer the questions of how and why this process happens. While participants in this study might be inclined to think more about succession, simply from reflecting on and talking about these issues during the interview process, the study does not seek to alter or control the subjects' behavior. Finally, the study was conducted through interviews with current chairs, thus placing it in a contemporary timeframe, meeting the final condition of Yin's argument.

Yin (2003) also lays out distinctions between single-case studies and multiple-case study designs. As Yin notes, "the decision to undertake multiple-case studies cannot be taken lightly. Every case should serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry" (p. 47). Yin compares multiple-case studies to that of replications in experiments: "each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)" (p. 47). This particular study is a multiple-case study, using each department chair as a unit of analysis while looking at succession planning as the overall scope of inquiry. Furthermore, the presumption is that the responses will differ based on several variables, such as discipline, the chair's own transition to the role, and length of time as chair, so a theoretical replication is an appropriate approach.

Research Design

This study is designed to gain a deeper understanding of succession planning among department chairs. By seeking information directly from current department chairs, valuable insight that can be gained regarding how chairs think about leadership succession. The following section describes the research design including the selection of the interview sample and the interview protocol.

Determining a population of department chairs who would be available for in-depth interviews and willing to talk about the leadership of their department is one of the challenges presented by the unique nature of this study. In order to develop a pool of potential participants, all current deans and a select group of recent former deans at one research extensive institution were asked to identify potential chairs who could speak about leadership and succession in their department. In all, 13 deans were asked to recommend “chairs who have demonstrated an understanding of the critical leadership issues facing department chairs, including leadership development and succession planning.” Eleven deans responded with a total of 36 recommended heads and chairs. That list was then culled to 17 department leaders who had served for at least one year. Each chair was then sent an email requesting their participation in a 90 minute, in depth, semi-structured interview. Sixteen of the department leaders agreed to be interviewed, although, despite several reminder emails, only 12 heads and chairs followed through to the point of scheduling and sitting for an interview.

The semi-structured interviews included the questions about the department, the chair’s transition to the role, and their thoughts about leadership development and continuity, with follow up probes asked as needed (See Appendix 1). Each interview was scheduled at the time and location of the participants’ convenience and choice. Ten of the interviews took place in the interviewee’s office, one in a departmental conference room, and the last in the researcher’s office, at the request of the participant. All interviews were audio-taped, with the consent of the participant, and then transcribed by the researcher.

Participants/Data Sources

The institution

This multiple-case study was conducted at a research extensive institution in the Northeast which, for the purposes of this study, will be identified as Snow Mountain University (SMU). The institution offered a convenient population where the researcher had access to the department chairs which helped to ensure a deep interview population. SMU had recently experienced leadership turnover at the top, as a new chancellor had just arrived on campus. The campus has benefited from several recent growth spurts: the landscape has seen a building boom in recent years, from the construction of new buildings to the renovation of old, after years of stagnancy; at the same time, there has been an ongoing campaign to expand the faculty body; and, after years of major budget cuts and while still far below historical levels, the state legislature has budgeted slight increases in recent years. At the time of the interviews, however, there were indications that, like many other institutions across the country, SMU would experience deep budget cuts due to the current financial crisis.

Other challenges face the campus. For example, despite the current construction, current facilities do not adequately meet the needs of students and faculty in the 21st century. The expansion of faculty through new hiring has been slowed by a crushing lack of appropriate laboratory and office space, now slowed even further by looming budget cuts. In addition, this public institution has struggled within its own university system and the state as a whole to gain the status, recognition and support normally accorded to a flagship institution. These challenges permeated the campus, and department chairs were not immune. The institution had just undergone a leadership transition, its ten-year reaccreditation review is scheduled for the coming year, and a strategic planning process is underway; thus it was an opportune time to examine how the department chairs were thinking about the future of their departments.

The participants

The following section provides a brief introduction to each of the 12 participants, in alphabetical order, (see Table 1), including what their transition was like and how they have approached leadership development efforts in their department. Names and minor identifying characteristics have been changed to protect the participants' anonymity.

Table 1: Overview of Participants

Name	Type of discipline	Years as Department Leader at SMU	Previous experience	Type of Leadership	Type of Recruitment
Ben	Hard sciences	>5	Chair at another institution	Chair	Internal search
Charlie	Applied	<3	Associate Head	Head	Internal candidate in a national search
Charlotte	Applied	>10	None	Head	No search
Jack	Applied	<3	None	Head	Internal search
Jonathan	Humanities	<3	Chair at another institution	Chair	External candidate in a national search
Katherine	Applied	<3	None	Chair	No search
Maria	Social sciences	<3	Acting chair	Chair	Internal search
Mark	Hard sciences	<3	Associate Chair	Chair	Internal search
Michael	Hard sciences	>5	Associate Head	Head	No search
Nicole	Humanities	<3	Chair at another institution	Chair	External candidate in a national search
Pam	Social sciences	>10	Acting chair	Chair	Internal search
Peter	Social sciences	<3	Center director	Chair	No search

Ben

Ben has served as chair of a hard sciences department for more than five years. He had little help from the former chair but had a relatively smooth transition. He benefited from years as chair at an institution in another country. He does not believe in leadership succession, which he thinks promulgates one way of thinking. Instead, he has empowered all faculty in the department to serve as leaders and believes that any one of them can and will step in when he steps down, which he recently told his faculty will happen in the next 18 – 24 months.

Charlie

Charlie is head of a professional department, having served in that capacity since 2006. The department had a failed national search, at the end of which he was asked to serve as interim head while a second search was launched. After several months of serving as interim head, the faculty in the department asked him to be a candidate for the permanent position. He was ultimately hired through the national search process. His transition was smooth, although he received little guidance from the former head. He had served as associate head and thus already had an understanding of the head's administrative responsibilities. He is actively engaging his faculty in conversations about leadership succession and is deciding about whether to serve a second term as head.

Charlotte

Charlotte has served as head of an applied professional department for more than ten years. She became the department leader, only two years after achieving tenure, when the then head abruptly quit during a review process. Her transition was very difficult, given the strain that developed between her and the former head, who shredded files and locked her out of the head's office for the first two weeks of her term. She has cultivated a few potential leaders but they have moved onto other administrative roles and she is not currently cultivating anyone. She gets little sleep as she tries to meet the demands of the head's role, maintain her research profile, and balance her family life, with three young children at home. She has no intention of stepping down soon because she perceives a lack of potential successors.

Jack

Jack has served as head of a professional department for a year and a half. His time as head has been extremely difficult as he was not the choice of the faculty but appointed by the dean. He recently stepped down and an new head has been hired from off-campus. Jack's transition to the role was difficult as he was chosen instead of the then associate department head. He had little help from the retiring head, simply one meeting. Jack led the department during a time of constant change in the school, and when a new interim dean was hired, he lost the support he had enjoyed in the Dean's office. The demographics of the department proved challenging and Jack had to deal with a group of four full professors who formed a shadow power structure. He recently stepped down and an external search has produced a permanent successor. Jack has been preparing for the transition in leadership by speaking often with the incoming head.

Jonathan

Jonathan was hired in 2006, through a national search, to chair a fine arts department at SMU. He has the most department leadership experience of all the participants, having served as chair at another institution for nearly two decades. His transition was relatively smooth, especially since he had assistance from the former chair.

Jonathan hopes to serve at least one more term as chair, possibly two, and really enjoys being a department chair.

Katherine

Katherine has served as chair of her applied science department since 2006, appointed following the abrupt resignation of the outgoing chair who has remained in the department as a faculty member. She had very little preparation for the role but has sought help through participation in national conferences and workshops. She feels that the role of chair is not an onerous one and really enjoys it. Although she hopes to serve as chair for another eight years, she already sees potential successors among her faculty colleagues. She is not actively grooming anyone but, when she is ready to step down, would like to appoint an associate chair who would then move into the chair's role.

Maria

Maria had been a graduate student in the social sciences department where she is now chair. She was on the faculty at another institution for a number of years prior to returning to SMU. She has served as chair since 2006 and is now contemplating her second term. Maria had one of the more deliberate and focused transitions of all the interviewees, having spent a semester meeting regularly with the outgoing chair and learning the ins and outs of the chair's role. Despite this preparation, her transition was still difficult, due to the amount of work the outgoing chair did on his own and because of the faculty's perception of the role. She also struggled to find someone to serve as acting chair while she took a sabbatical. She is interested in serving a second term but has asked the personnel committee to conduct a review prior to her agreeing to serve. She worries about who will serve as the next chair, given the demographics of the department and the faculty's perception that the chair's role is too much work.

Mark

Mark is a long-time faculty member at SMU who has served as interim chair of a hard sciences department for two years. He stepped in following a failed national search. His transition was smooth and he often sought help from former chairs in the department. He also relied heavily on the staff in the department. He has not cultivated faculty in the department for the chair's role, primarily because the dean ordered the department to conduct another national search, which is currently underway.

Michael

Michael has served as head of a hard sciences department since the fall of 2002, when his predecessor unexpectedly quit. Having served as the associate department head for many years, he was viewed as the only choice to succeed the outgoing head. The department suffered devastating faulty retirements during 2002 and 2003 due to an early retirement incentive. The transition was abrupt but relatively smooth, thanks to the assistance of the outgoing head. His leadership style has tended – self-admittedly – towards an autocratic nature. As he nears the end of his tenure as chair, however, he was delegated greater responsibility to others in the department. He sees a potential successor in the department and has appointed that person to highly visible leadership roles in the department. He acknowledges that there will be disagreement in the department about whether this person is indeed his natural successor. Michael did consciously announce his intention to step down early so that the department would have time to find the next chair and he anticipates working closely with that person during the transition. Michael feels strongly that, with the presence of former department leaders, an incoming head has a lot of support and help. He also believes that faculty members with young children should not serve as head, since the responsibilities of being department head are so great.

Nicole

Nicole has served as chair of a multi-disciplinary, humanities department since 2006. She was hired as the result of an external search, after serving as chair at a smaller institution. The department had been formed two years before her arrival through a merger of independent departments. The department is now organized into units with individual unit leaders and Nicole serving as the chair. Her transition was also relatively smooth, with the assistance of the interim chair. She faced several personnel difficulties early on and quickly learned what resources were available to her. Nicole is nearing the end of her first term and hopes to serve a second. The department personnel committee will be conducting a review of her first term. She has interest in higher administrative office. She sees several possibilities for successors but the department faces demographic challenges in terms of distribution across faculty ranks.

Pam

Pam is, of those who participated in the study, the longest-serving chair at SMU with nearly 15 years of experience leading a social sciences department. She was selected as chair following a campus search that took place while she was on sabbatical. Her transition was abrupt – with little help from the former chair – but she had served as acting chair several summers and understood the challenges of being chair. She is currently deciding whether to remain as chair or return to the faculty. She is not actively cultivating future leaders but sees many leadership development opportunities in the department.

Peter

Chair of a social sciences department since 2006, Peter had previously directed an interdisciplinary program at SMU. He became chair after a failed national search for a chair and was recruited to the position by the then interim chair. He had a smooth transition to the role and rarely sought help from the former chair. Peter is now debating whether or not to serve a second term or to return to the faculty. He misses his academic activities and struggles to balance his administrative and faculty roles.

Data Coding and Analysis

As noted earlier, all interviews were audio taped, with permission of the interview subject (See Appendix 2, the informed consent form), and then transcribed. By audio taping the interviews, the researcher was able to focus and to take notes on the nuances of the interview, such as observations of the interview location, body language of the interview subject, and tone of voice. In order to enhance trustworthiness, each interview subject was asked to review the transcript for accuracy.

At the start of the analysis process, the researcher listened to each interview twice and took extensive notes. The next step was to thoroughly read each transcript and to conduct preliminary open coding on the transcripts. At that stage, 28 categories were identified; through axial coding, these 28 categories were then collapsed into a smaller number of themes. Spradley's (1979) method of searching for relationships between categories helped to identify a framework for leadership continuity, including three dimensions that impact how a chair can help his/her department to increase and enhance leadership capacity.

Analysis of this study used Yin's (2003) three pronged strategy for meeting the difficult challenge of analyzing case study data: 1) rely on those theoretical frameworks that initially shaped the study, 2) take the time to think about "rival explanations" (p. 112), and 3) "develop a descriptive framework for organizing the case study" (p. 114). These strategies provided the foundation for the analysis of the data gathered throughout this study.

The initial analysis process focused on each individual case, using Yin's theoretical proposition method, which dictates that the researcher "follow the theoretical propositions that led to [the] case study" (p. 111). In this study, that meant examining the stresses and challenges facing current department chairs and exploring how their experiences shaped their thinking about succession and leadership development in the department. The second step in the analysis of the individual cases was to look for rival theories, described by Yin (2003) as a way to improve confidence in one's findings. This process enabled the researcher the opportunity to think about other arguments that could be made from the data. Such a procedure also enhanced the trustworthiness of the conclusions by addressing alternate theories throughout the analysis. The third strategy espoused by Yin is to develop a "case description" (p. 114). This process involves creating a narrative to explain what is happening in the data, similar to Wolcott's (1994) descriptive technique in which he encourages all "qualitative researcher…to be storytellers" (p. 17). By creating narrative and outlines to describe the findings, a researcher is able to make the results come alive by sharing their observations in an engaging manner. Each of these techniques was used to ensure a thorough analysis of the data.

Trustworthiness

One of the difficulties of conducting qualitative research is conducting trustworthy analysis that then leads to sound conclusions (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Merriam (1998) outlines a number of steps that can improve the trustworthiness of a study, including but not limited to: triangulation, member checks, peer examination, and participatory or collaborative modes of research. These techniques, as outlined below, helped to improve the reliability and trustworthiness of this study.

Triangulation, or the use of multiple sources to confirm findings, was utilized through the analysis of the surveys, interview transcripts and field notes. Member checks were conducted through the distribution of individual interview transcripts to participants so that each individual can review their interview transcript for accuracy. Peer examination is a critical piece of the analysis process and, by sharing initial findings with others interested in this topic, the final analysis is more reliable. One of the benefits of the doctoral dissertation process is the ongoing feedback provided by peers and committee members. The role of the committee, especially the committee chair, by its very nature, fulfills Merriam's suggestion to involve others in "all phases of the research from conceptualizing the study to writing up the findings" (p. 205).

Researcher Bias

It is important to note researcher bias that might exist when conducting the study at SMU, an institution where the researcher had held a professional position in one of the senior academic administrative offices for more than ten years. The nature of this position was not an evaluative one; the researcher did not have authority over individual department chairs that could impact personnel, budget, curricular, or other critical decisions. The position is, however, one in which the researcher had worked closely with individual department leaders on a variety of projects and was widely known to many others. The benefit of these connections is that it provided access; department chairs at SMU seemed to be more likely to agree to participate than chairs at another institution. It should be noted, however, that chairs at SMU might have seen this study as an opportunity to send messages to the upper administration. Steps were taken – through clear and concise communications with the participants – to make it clear to study participants that all data would remain confidential and anonymous so as to limit any potential tainting of the data. Shortly after the interviews were conducted, the researcher took a new job outside of the academic administrative offices.

Limitations

The goal of this study is to gain critical understanding of the succession process at the departmental level. Given the vast differences in chair experiences at different institutions, this study seeks to find best practices that would be applicable across departments, regardless of size, disciplinary or departmental culture, by carefully focusing on the role of the individual department chair. Given that the study utilizes a limited sample size and was conducted at one institution, it must be recognized that the results of this study will not necessarily be valid for department leaders at other institutions of higher education. The findings at one institution, however, may provide insights and an understanding of the complexity of issues involved in enhancing leadership capacity in academic departments. The research design provides rich, broad data that spans disciplines but does not provide a deep understanding of the issues facing all disciplines nor all institution types. Despite this limitation, the study has an immediate impact by, at the very least, providing a map for future research.

Conclusion

This study presents a unique opportunity to learn more about the process of leadership succession among department chairs. Given the challenges facing higher education, this is a particularly timely study. It also has the potential to influence the way department chairs and institutions think about leadership development and succession. By focusing on the department chair as a central and key player in academic leadership, this study provides institutions with critical knowledge about their own leaders and ways in which they can support those faculty members who will become higher education's future leaders.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the data analysis from this study. As revealed in the literature review and later confirmed through data collection and analysis, succession planning as defined by the corporate sector does not occur at the university department chair level. While chairs can cultivate potential leaders, they are not in a position to name their own successors and this practice would be antithetical to the culture of shared governance that defines higher education. Instead, the findings from this study indicate that chairs either consciously or unconsciously facilitate **<u>leadership continuity</u>** efforts in their departments. The chairs in this study reveal that leadership continuity occurs as they identify, prepare, and cultivate potential leaders who have the skills and knowledge to most readily step in as chair so that departments can maintain momentum across leadership transitions. To shed light on this process, this chapter first provides an overview of the three major findings and then examines each one in depth.

The results of this study indicate that there is a cyclical nature to department leadership transitions which can be viewed through a temporal lens in which the past, the present, and the future are not only intrinsically linked but have the capacity and power to continually influence behavior. Looking at the current chair's role in leadership continuity, Figure 1 demonstrates how current chairs are shaped by the past – their prior experiences and transition to the role – and the present – faculty perception of the role, department leadership structures, distribution of faculty by rank – which subsequently influences how they think about the transition for the next chair. The current chair then prepares for the future by cultivating colleagues first through the identification of those faculty members who have the proper skill set and personality for the role and then through the placement of those faculty in critical leadership roles. This is a cycle that continues over time through each leadership transition in the department. The department leaders in this study indicate that intervention early in this cycle may better support leadership continuity in the future.

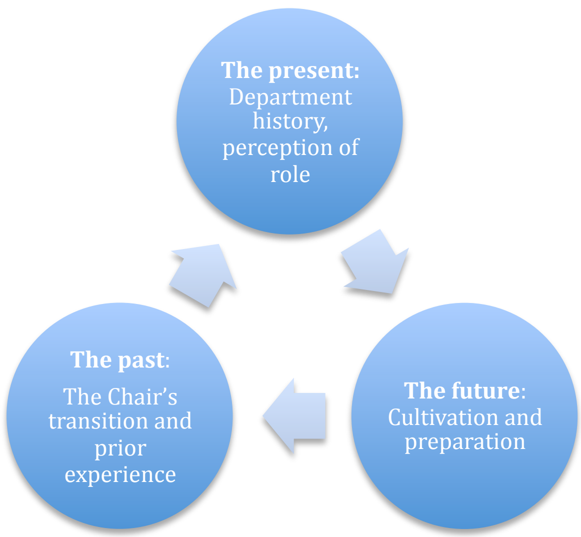

Figure 1: Temporal phases of leadership continuity

In order to better understand the dynamics of leadership transition within these temporal phases, it is necessary to examine three critical dimensions – department context, transition process, and individual leadership – which influence the current chairs efforts toward leadership continuity (see Figure 2). Below is a brief overview of how each dimension can impact the overall goal of leadership continuity at the departmental level.

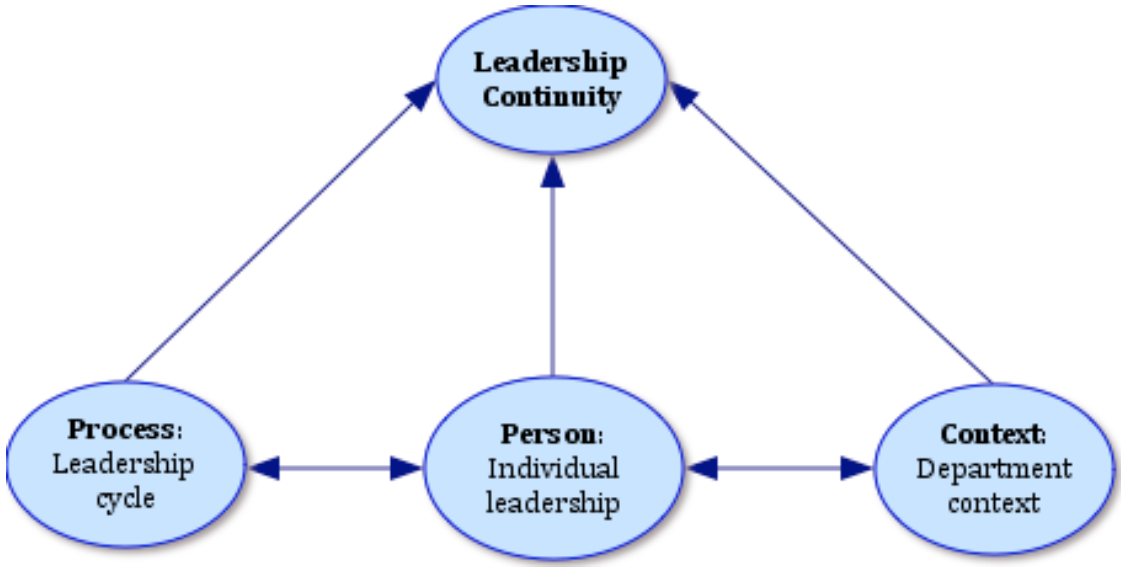

Figure 2: Preliminary Overview of Leadership Continuity Dimensions

In any organization, context is critical. Individual departments have their own culture and climate; department chairs must learn how to best function in their environment, which can seemingly change overnight when a faculty member moves into the leadership role. To do so, especially in terms of leadership continuity, current department chairs become cognizant of key contextual factors, such as the history of leadership in the department and the distribution of faculty rank, when considering which faculty members might be future department chairs. For instance, at Snow Mountain University (SMU), a cyclical history of budget cuts have left a bimodal distribution of faculty, with many departments having greater numbers of full and assistant professors and very few at the associate rank. This distribution model has had a profound impact on how chairs think about their own tenure and who they look at as future leaders of the department, even more so because many of the full professors are nearing retirement age. Other influential factors include the type of recruiting for past leadership, such as whether the department has a history of hiring externally or internally, and the type of leadership, e.g. whether the department leader is a head or chair. While these two factors do not necessarily determine a specific direction for leadership continuity efforts, it appears that current chairs think strategically about these issues and take them into account when considering the department's future.

As noted in the conceptual framework, departments are organized along disciplinary boundaries and, as such, are influenced by the norms of that specific discipline. They are further shaped by the institutional culture and must operate within the accepted bounds of both cultures. While this study did not find any major disciplinary differences in how department chairs approached leadership continuity efforts, it is important to note that all of the departments in this sample operate in the same institutional context, but in different disciplines. The implications of the disciplinary context and suggestions for additional research in this area will be explored further in chapter five.

The second dimension of leadership continuity is the transition process itself. The findings demonstrate that departments follow a natural leadership cycle (see Figure 3): the search for a new chair; the transition of that chair; leadership routinization, adapted from role theory which considers role routinization as the time when "relationships between the parties have stabilized" (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 258); the anticipation of change; and lastly, the preparation for the next transition in leadership. How the current chair experiences each of these stages influences how they think about the cultivation of potential leaders and how they approach leadership continuity efforts.

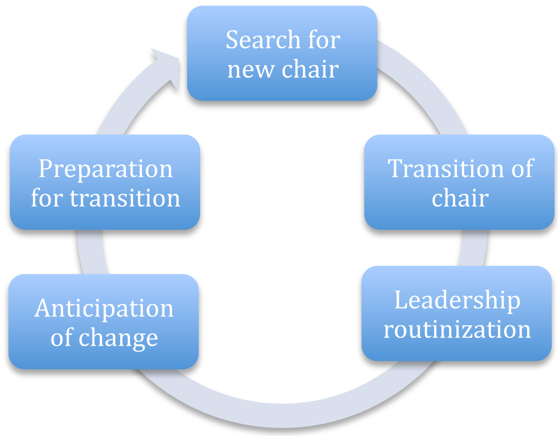

Figure 3: Department Leadership Cycle

Individual leadership – namely, the chair in his/her role as leader of this process – is the final dimension. The chair is, to a large degree, shaped by both the department context and the leadership cycle. As evidenced by the literature review, each department chair's experience is unique to the intersection of his/her institution *and* discipline. Each chair is therefore a product of the intersections of their discipline and the institutional and departmental contexts in which they operate. The influence, however, is not uni-directional; the chair – even while being shaped by the context and working within the cyclical process of transition – is an active catalyst that drives the nature and outcomes of the particular manifestation of leadership continuity within each department. The chairs in this study play a critical role in promoting leadership continuity, regardless of contextual or procedural differences. Taking this finding one step further, the chair is in a unique position to influence the future of the department, having a holistic perspective of the intersection of the department, institution and discipline.

Previous research on role theory identifies both manifest and latent roles (Bess & Dee, 2008). For department leaders, who often have no formal position description, there are roles and responsibilities are that overtly acknowledged – recognized as manifest roles – and others that are not – identified as latent roles. Manifest roles are recognized and codified, such as the chair's fiduciary responsibilities for the department. Latent roles, on the other hand, are not formally acknowledged and are often left unstated, e.g. the chair's role in supporting faculty development at all ranks and in mentoring pre-tenure faculty. The findings from this study suggest that chairs not only recognize their latent role in thinking about and planning for future leadership of the department, but also often take steps to actively cultivate future leaders in the department.

Having provided an overview of the findings, the rest of this chapter provides an in-depth examination of each of these critical dimensions of leadership continuity.

Context: How the department context influences leadership continuity

A critical task for department chairs is to understand the unique departmental context in which they operate and then to use that knowledge to move the department forward. As noted in chapter three, every academic department is unique, shaped by disciplinary and institutional forces. The chairs interviewed over the course of this study recognize the need to learn and acknowledge the distinctive departmental context and are also keenly aware of the limitations placed upon them by forces often outside of their control. These include the distribution of faculty ranks in the department, the type of leadership, the extent of the recruitment process, and finally, the faculty's perception of the chair's role.

Distribution of rank: Not enough associates

As mentioned earlier, a history of cyclical budget cuts at SMU has left many departments with high numbers of full and assistant professors, but few associate professors. In addition, in many departments, a significant portion of full professors are nearing retirement age with little interest in taking on the chair role. Nicole, chair of a humanities department, succinctly summarizes the problem that many of the chairs are facing:

> We are very low in mid-career faculty. We have some senior, senior faculty who are ready to retire. We don't have very many – almost no – newly tenured, and very few mid career people. Very few associate professors in general…

Charlotte, head of an applied management department with less than 15 tenure system faculty, raises similar concerns when asked about finding someone to serve as associate head in her department: "You get two assistant professors, they really can't do it. We had three until this past year. It's very thin when I go look at who can be the associate and who wants to do it is the other question."

The chairs are acutely aware of the problem and understand that this demographic trend limits the number of people whom they can cultivate as future chairs. Many current chairs recognize potential among some of the assistant professors but understand that they might not be ready to serve in a leadership role for a number of years. As Nicole states, "There are some great younger people in the department and I guess it is sort of a question of when they are going to feel like they can take this on."

The dearth of associate professors has imposed difficulties on current chairs when they think about future leadership of the department and has led some chairs to rely more on full professors, as Jonathan, chair of a fine arts department, has done:

> The challenge I have is that I have all these professors and I don't have any associates and then I have only a couple of assistant professors and everybody else is non-tenure track. And so, these brand new assistant professors, I don't want to load them with too much because we want to make sure they are getting out into the world and getting research done…all that sort of stuff. So, I have had to turn more to our full professors who have been here a long time and the ones that would be able to move into some of these leadership positions like graduate

coordinator, whatever, have either done it before or they're aware of it already so it is a different type of dynamic.

Maria, while recognizing the benefits of having full professors serve as chair, also sees potential drawbacks:

> This is the conundrum of having full professors being chair because, if they have been in the department for long enough, they tend to think that we do things this way because we have always done them this way. They tend to be the most resistant to change.

Michael, who has served as head of a hard sciences department for five years, pays careful attention to the age of his colleagues, and not just their rank. Having served as head while having young children at home, Michael is very sensitive to the demands of the head's job and the difficulties of balancing the workload with family needs. He strongly believes that faculty members with young children should not serve as department leader but also recognizes the realities of the department's demographics:

> There are a few people who are around, close to 50, that's not too young. Their kids are older and then they can, you know, they can handle it. A lot of the future heads I see though are right around 40, so maybe a little young to be head. They could do it, it's just optimal if they don't. But again, we don't have a lot of options.

Maria, chair of a social science department and one of the few associate professors interviewed, is concerned about the impact serving as chair can have on someone's ability to be promoted to full professor:

> So, there is a little bit of a squeeze and there are only two, three, there are three associate professors other than myself and all of them are in this mode of feeling like this would be such an overwhelming task and they have their own research going, etc. So, it is a bit daunting.

As a young associate professor with a goal of being promoted to full professor, Maria has struggled to balance the administrative demands of her role with her academic pursuits. The pressure she has been under has made her anxious about putting a colleague in the same difficult position:

> If I served another term as chair, we would have four tenure reviews in those three years and there would at least be other associate professors but then they would be in the same situation that I am in. So, it's a challenge.

The bimodal distribution of faculty rank impacts not only who current chairs and heads can look to as potential future department leaders, but also affects how long the chairs themselves are thinking about serving in the role. Charlotte, a long-time head of an applied management discipline, feels that she cannot step down until "I can find someone to take over." She had been cultivating two associate heads but both were recruited for other administrative roles. While Charlotte is not now actively seeking to find her successor, she is looking for people she could cultivate so that the department will have a smooth transition of leadership in the future. With the loss of her two associate heads, she feels more pressure to stay on as head to provide stability and leadership to the department. Charlie, head of a professional field, looks at potential successors and recognizes that there might not be anybody ready at the end of his first term:

> This is my second official year…I think I will make it through three. And, of course, the question is, is this quantum? Is it going to be three or six, right?...I think that the next, I think the next best person to be chair or department head will best be ready to go after my sixth year. I am not sure that we are ready after three years for a change.

As the findings reveal, chairs are not only conscious of the potential impact of rank distribution in the department, but also use that knowledge in their decision making about leadership continuity and their own length of service as department leader.

Department leadership structures

Chairs must operate within the context of their department's culture, history, and experiences. When planning for leadership continuity, it is critical to take into account both the history of the department and the different leadership models that departments follow. The subsequent section highlights two critical aspects of department leadership structures: the type of leadership and type of recruitment.

Type of leadership: Head v. chair

Institutions use different terminology to label department leaders: department chair or department head. For some departments and institutions, there is a technical distinction between the words, with department chairs being selected by the faculty while the dean selects department heads. At SMU, which was unionized in the 1970s, there is no prescribed distinction between department chairs and department heads. The findings from this study, however, suggest that there is a difference in how heads and chairs perceive their own role based on their title. Chairs come from the faculty and are, as suggested by Birnbaum (1988), "first among equals" (p. 89) while heads are chosen by the administration and are therefore perceived by the faculty as being members of the administration. This difference, even if only in perception, may add to the role ambiguity and conflict that department leaders often face, as described previously in the literature review. Department leaders face an ever-present tension in their role identification: are they a member of the faculty or a member of the administration? For some of the department leaders in the study, the answer is clear. As Maria succinctly states, "I am a faculty member first and foremost. I am an academic." For Maria and her department, this distinction is not simply symbolic but cultural: "Because we have a chair, we don't have a head. And the way that our consensus building department works, if that person doesn't have the full support of the department, they are just completely ineffective." For her department, having a chair is a function of their departmental culture. At the other end of the spectrum, one of the department heads, Charlie, is consciously moving his department closer to a department chair model and views the title of department head as purely symbolic:

> And I am not operating in a head fashion, by the way. I am operating, I think, more in a chair way. And I think there are several reasons for that. I think a head can be beneficial when the head has a strong leadership personality and who perceives that they themselves have vision. Since I am not of that sort, I actually think that the vision can be collectively derived from the faculty and so my role is different, I view my role being different than that of the head. It just doesn't fit right. And I've seen models of successful departments that are, I would say, more democratic and operate with this chair and that's where I am trying to move the department.

While the differences between head and chair at SMU are often considered semantic, Jack's experience shows the potential pitfalls of serving as head. Following an internal search process in which the faculty recommended another candidate but the dean appointed him, Jack's tenure as department head was contentious and, ultimately, short-lived:

> It's a whole new ball game once you get in there and when you start trying to make better use of your resources or trying to do things that are fair and balanced, it's a challenge. I will tell you, it is a real challenge. So I see a real difference. I think the thing that was surprising to me is the fact that the faculty want a lot of control but voted for a department head as opposed to a department chair.

Although SMU does not make a formal distinction between heads and chairs, the department leaders interviewed throughout the course of this study recognize that their title impacts how the department perceives their role, how they view their own role and how it may contribute to the chairs' tension some feel regarding their role identification.

Whether functional or symbolic, the title can influence how current department leaders look for future leaders to fill their role.

<u>Type of recruitment: Internal or external</u>

The chair's role has historically been viewed as one that rotates among faculty members and, in some departments, tradition is that each faculty member will take his/her turn as chair. The findings from this study suggest that, while this practice remains true in some departments, others have actively sought chairs through national searches. Some departments view the chair's role with a much more discerning eye than may have been true in the past as campuses recognize the increasing complexity of the chair's role and responsibility. While the type of recruitment does not have a direct impact on leadership continuity efforts, it can influence how current chairs think about such activities for the future. If a department has always hired internally, would they ever consider looking externally if the situation warranted, or vice versa? These are issues that chairs might not have control over but they should pay attention to the expectations of the department.

The culture of some departments dictates the strong desire to only seek internal candidates for chair. Departments with a history of rotating from one faculty member to the next may have a difficult time envisioning bringing in an external chair. Katherine, chair of an applied sciences department, strongly believes that her department would fare better with an internal candidate when she is ready to step down:

> I personally think we have some very capable people inside and, to me, the reason I think you would bring in an external chair is to make some major changes. Like you need some new ideas, fresh ideas, get this group off their butts to move forward, but we're not in that position. And therefore, I feel internal is much better because they know the culture, they understand what's here and there is going to be no surprises.

Maria worries that, despite the possibility of not having someone to step in when she is ready to step down, the idea of hiring an external chair runs counter to the culture of the department:

> I think if I really did step down, now or in three years, that someone else would pick it up because of this issue of consensus building and democracy, this departmental culture, I think that is in part why everyone felt so safe with me because even though I had only been on campus for three or four years when I became chair, I had been a graduate student here and so they all knew me from the late 80's and so I was a known entity inside and out.

Ben, chair of a hard science department, sees other challenges to bringing in an external chair: not enough lab or office space to accommodate another faculty member in the department. This practical limitation, along with more affective concerns, need to be considered.

While there is often an expectation that the department chair role will be in near constant rotation, more departments have begun to look outside of the institution for department leaders. The general perception that departments only hire externally during times of crisis is challenged by the findings of this study.

Some of the chairs who participated in the study view the hire of an external chair as an indication that there is a problem in the department. As Pam, a chair in a social science department for nearly 15 years, notes,

> If I thought that the department really needed shaking up, you know somebody new to come in and have an entirely new division, the department was in chaos, then an external search would seem to be the right thing to do because such a person would not know the culture of the department, would just sort of come in and develop their own agenda and orientation in the context of our policies and procedures which you can't escape. So, this department works very well. I don't think it needs to be shaken up.

Katherine echoes her concerns:

> You bring in an external chair, God knows what they are going to do. But I see the value in an external chair when the situation in the department needs that to get some new ideas and problems resolved, clean house kind of thing.

Two chairs who were hired externally, Jonathan and Nicole, dispute this perspective. Having been recruited from other institutions, they, not surprisingly, see benefits to coming in as outsiders. While they recognize that some departments hire externally due to a dysfunction in the department, they also acknowledge and embrace the idea that an external chair can sometimes present new perspectives and fresh opportunities for a department. For Nicole, at first reluctant to consider going to a new institution as an external chair, the experience of being a candidate at several institutions opened her eyes to the positive impacts of hiring from off campus:

> I used to always think that only dysfunctional departments hired outside chairs so it was quite interesting to me when I started applying for chair jobs…And so that is when I started realizing that there are all kinds of different reasons why departments hire outside chairs. Some of them are truly dysfunctional, I got wind of a few of those. Some of them, they were quite frank, this is a way in which we can hire a senior person that we wouldn't be able to hire otherwise. So different kinds of things. The [SMU] situation was, with the consolidation, it was kind of a logical step to take. So I have a much more encouraging...actually, colleagues when they ask me about, what as it like to go somewhere as a chair, I say, do it! It's interesting, you know?

While some departments made conscious decisions to search for external chairs, others were urged – or even ordered – to do so by their dean. For instance, his dean told Mark, interim chair of a hard sciences department, that the department must do an outside search. As a long-time faculty member, Mark has seen where external searches had failed in the past, an experience which has left him hesitant:

> Back in, I think, probably, 1970, 1971. He was the chair for four years, maybe five years. A bunch of us went to the dean and to the provost at the time and just said, either he goes or we go. But then he turned...he was a very good faculty member, definitely marched to his own drummer. But the people that were still here, like myself, are still very leery of going outside.

These concerns highlight some of the difficulties departments face when it comes to finding the right person to lead the department. How a department approaches the recruitment process can influence a chair's transition to the role – whether they are hired from inside or outside the institution.

Faculty perception of the chair's role

Another critical factor is the perception of the faculty and how they envision the chair's role, perceptions that can vary widely. Some faculty members believe that department leaders wield enormous power and influence. In some departments, faculty expect the chair to do much of the work of running the department while, in others, faculty expect that chairs will delegate authority to faculty committees. The perception of the faculty and what they expect from their department leaders can have a direct impact on the chair's experience and how they approach leadership continuity efforts. If, for instance, faculty members view the position as too onerous, it can make it difficult to develop potential leaders. In addition, unrealistic perceptions by the faculty may also lead to impossibly high expectations imposed on the chair, and possibly setting them up for failure.

When Maria first became chair, she faced high expectations, especially succeeding a long-term and well-respected chair:

> But I think there are a couple of people who just think that I have this enormous amount of power and that I just sit down here and make decisions on people's fates all day, you know? And, no amount of talking to them convinces them [otherwise].

Pam, the longest serving chair at SMU to participate in the study, is concerned that, given her nearly 15 year tenure as chair, it will be difficult to convince her peers that they do not need to think about it as such a long-term commitment. As she notes,

> I do know that faculty are concerned in our department about two things. They know the job is complicated and they are concerned about who is going to take over when I step down. And that's a reasonable concern…But there are a number of good faculty who could step into this role and they don't need to think about it as a 14 year stint either. They can think about it as a three-year stint. So, that is obviously much more manageable.

When Mark was asked to serve as chair, he was surprised by the faculty's perception of what he could do as chair. Given his four-decade tenure on campus and active involvement in campus governance, his faculty members expected him to use those relationships in order to advance the department:

> They said, you've been around, you know a lot of people. And I said, I don't know people that way. I said, I can't go over to [the administration building] and say, I've known you for 30 years, you need to do this for me. I said, if that is what you think I will do, I will not do that. I said, I don't want to be treated by them any differently than I have been in the past and I don't want to treat them any differently.

The idea that the faculty members in his department thought he would be a good chair because of his collegial relationships with many administrators on campus made Mark realize how differently the faculty viewed the chair's role. He quickly sought to dissuade them of that perception so that both the chair and the faculty had same expectations for how he would operate as the chair.

For Maria, due for an upcoming sabbatical, the onerous task of finding someone to serve as acting department chair during the spring semester, demonstrates to her that the faculty perception of the chair's role is an impediment to future transitions:

> I am going to be on sabbatical next semester and it took a while...no one, I mean I had to beg, borrow, bribe, flatter to get someone - one person - willing to be chair next semester because everyone else in the department including all the full professors just find the idea of the task so overwhelming that they are not willing to take it on, given what else they are doing right now. And so, I thought, okay so their perception is that the task has become so overwhelming that, you know, this

> is an issue we have to change because I am not going to be chair for the rest of my life {laughter}. It's just not going to happen.

Chairs need to understand how faculty members perceive their role and then work to bring perception closer to reality. This will enhance efforts to have leadership continuity in the department by having all members of the department sharing a vision and an understanding of what department leadership should be.

As noted earlier, every department has its own unique culture that impacts how faculty in the department think about leadership. A department's past experiences, such as the nature of the leader's role and how that chair or head was recruited, have the potential to influence the future prospects for leadership development and continuity. Faculty members in a department like Mark's, which had a negative experience with an externally hired chair, might be hesitant to look outside the campus for a new department leader in the future. Given the uniqueness of every department's leadership experiences and perceptions, it is important to take the unique departmental context into account when thinking about and planning leadership continuity efforts.

Process: The impact of the department leadership cycle

The nature of the department chair position is one of change; faculty members rotate in and out of the position on a relatively predictable basis. The findings from this study reveal a cycle to department leadership that provides an opportunity for deeper understanding of leadership continuity efforts. The five stages of the leadership cycle are: the search for a new chair; the transition of that chair; leadership routinization, a time when chairs have learned their role and the faculty have recognized them as having that authority; the anticipation of change; and finally, the preparation for the next transition in leadership (see Figure 3). Each stage of the cycle offers an opportunity to enhance leadership continuity efforts. The following sections will examine this phenomenon more closely.

The department leadership cycle is intrinsically linked to the first dimension, context. How a department approaches each leadership style is shaped by the culture of the department. For instance, the initial step of the first stage – the search for a chair – is to determine if and how to conduct the search. That decision is shaped by many factors including whether or not the department has a history of searching for the department leader exclusively on campus. As the previous section demonstrates, the history of leadership selection shapes how the department plans for future leadership. Thus, the context is a crucial factor in how the leadership cycle occurs in each department.

Stage one: Search for a new chair

The search process is critical, whether a department is recruiting on or off campus. This study exposed a wide spectrum of recruitment processes, from nearly non-existent internal searches to all-inclusive national campaigns. A typical department search process is as follows: Whether searching for a chair internally or externally, departments form a search committee, recruit candidates, interview them, vote on who they want to appoint and then forward the recommendation to the dean who makes the formal appointment. In some cases, when departments are hiring heads, the dean makes the appointment on their own, not always following the recommendation of the faculty, as in Jack's case. The subsequent sections will highlight instances when departments operate outside of the norm and the impact searches can have on the chair.

Departments in distress.

In times of leadership crisis, departments seem to rely less on formal search processes and instead work quickly to appoint a leader as soon as possible. Charlotte, head of an applied management department, describes her selection as the department leader: "There wasn't a search process. It was just, okay, who can step in now?" Michael, head of a hard sciences department, had a similar experience when his predecessor quit unexpectedly following a series of major budget cuts and retirements:

> He just couldn't stand it anymore. This was right in the middle of the collapse. We had just lost nine faculty, just two months earlier. At the end of August, nine faculty retired with the [early retirement incentive]. It was a mess. Our search had been collapsed, all our positions had been taken away, all the start-up had been removed…It was terrible. It was terrible. That was a bad year – 2002 and 2003 – all the cuts. The little posted cuts. Every day you would go to the chancellor's website and see what they cut that day. That was brutal. And so I ran the faculty meeting and it was just obvious that, you know, I had to be head. People wanted me to be head…And so everybody wanted me to do it, so I said fine. I basically have been completely head since that day…Well, eventually the dean said, oh you have to have a search and a committee so they appointed a committee and blah, blah, blah. Stuff happened. Eventually, I signed some paperwork.

Peter, chair of a social sciences department, seemed to create his own search process when he was asked to consider serving as chair following the failure of an external search:

> So, we had an interim chair, we had a search that didn't work out, we didn't realize this, probably not until March…before we knew. And then I remember [the interim chair] came into my office at one point and he says, how would you like to be chair? And I was totally taken aback. And he know, he's a very persuasive guy…And so, I thought well, I'll consider it, I mean, I'll think about it. I think the first thing I did was I asked the staff to meet with me and they were like, what the hell is going on? Are we all getting our pink slips? One person asked and I said no. And I asked them, whether they would, I told them a little about what I would be thinking about it and whether they would support that, because I knew that there was absolutely nothing I could do if the staff weren't behind me and they said that they were and I believe them. Then, it was a matter of whether the faculty wanted that…I said to the faculty, here's where I am and this is what

> where I see things unfolding but it was up to them. So, they held a vote and it was approved and I switched over. So, it was sort of abrupt.

When a department is in crisis, the faculty recognize the need for any sign of stable leadership and are eager to fill the role with seemingly less emphasis on the process undertaken to do so.

<u>Signal of support.</u>

For some department leaders, the search process in itself can act as a demonstration of the faculty's support for their leadership. In several cases, these signals of support played a role in the chair's decision to accept the role. Charlie, head of a professional department, was asked to serve as interim head following a failed national search. When a second national search was launched during his tenure as interim head, the faculty asked him to consider applying for the permanent position. This request meant a great deal to him and, as he explains, was one of the reasons why he ultimately did apply for the position and then accepted it at the end of the national search:

> And certainly, it is a powerful signal when the faculty do ask you, even after having done it for a year. So that is a powerful signal and I think I am the type of person maybe who needs to be asked whether than one who will step across the line and volunteer.

Despite going through a formal search process, Maria still worries about whether or not she was truly the first choice for the position. She echoes the importance of feeling like she has the faculty's support:

> [The search committee] asked us to let them know if there was any reason that we could foresee why we could not serve in the role as chair, such as a sabbatical, fellowship, travel, etc. And so, I couldn't think of any reason why I would not be able to serve as chair and so then when we got to the first faculty caucus after that, they announced that only one person had not withdrawn their name. And so, therefore, it was just me that they were considering. So, they asked me to write a statement and I did and then we got to the faculty meeting, or the department meeting, and the search committee announced that they were putting me forward

> and everyone said yay and clapped and that was about it. And I was sort of left wanting at that point because you never want to feel like, well you're the person with the short straw. And I know that it really wasn't that and several people afterwards when I expressed that, said, it's that when we heard that you had not withdrawn your name, we all withdrew our names because we thought that you would do a great job…And some of them were probably not completely disingenuous about that but you want, I think, in whoever you select as chair, because it is largely a thankless job and because it is a position of responsibility, that you really want that person to feel like they have the department's support.

Chairs often seek out signals from their faculty that they have support and perhaps a mandate to lead the department. These signals can play a role in the chair’s decision to accept the role and how they feel about leading the department. Knowing that a chair has the support of the faculty can be a morale and confidence booster. This show of support starts with the search process, when faculty members signal their support with their votes. The search process is a critical piece and should not be viewed as simply a symbolic action.

Stage two: Transition to the role

The transition to the chair’s role is often difficult regardless if the chair is hired internally or externally. All chairs must learn what it means to be chair and accept the new roles and responsibilities that they now have. They need to learn how to work within the culture of their department, even those who came from the faculty because serving as chair changes their perspective. For department leaders who bring extensive prior experiences as chair elsewhere still need to understand the rules, regulations and policies of the institution and how to navigate through the bureaucracy of the institution.

As discussed in the literature review, institutions of higher education do very little to prepare faculty for leadership roles, thus making transitions into those roles even more difficult. Mark, chair of a hard sciences department, sought advice from a colleague who had recently retired from a senior position in an international corporation:

> When I was offered this position, I went over and talked to John [Doe]. John is very blunt. He said, you know, that is the problem with academia. You don't train anybody to do any administrating. What you do is you end up with people who can't make it in the lab or are just tired of doing it. They think, I've got to do something because I can't retire, so I will become an administrator. So then he talked about how at [his former company], they would take young scientists and say, you know, it looks as though you like administrating. Let's take a year, we're not going to take you out of the lab completely but we're going to give you experience. He said, you guys really should do that. And…no, no we don't do that.

In examining the differences between transitions for chairs from on-campus and from off-campus, the findings from this study suggest that department leaders who are hired from off-campus may benefit from a "honeymoon" period that on-campus chairs and heads do not experience. The next section examines these differing experiences and how it impacts their transitions.

<u>Transitions from the outside.</u>

Jonathan and Nicole, the two chairs hired externally, both enjoyed the recruitment process where they found the faculty at SMU to be very honest about both the challenges and opportunities facing the departments and the institution as a whole. As Jonathan explains,

> So I felt that coming up to [SMU], yes it would be challenging but I had done it for a long time and the sorts of issues, like faculty evaluation, searches, you know, the things that tend to be the core things that a chair is often working on are things that I had done over and over and because I felt that the faculty seemed quite open and willing to talk things through.

Both Jonathan and Nicole are appreciative of the welcome they received, including emails from faculty offering information about the local school systems and realtors. They also both note how quickly faculty started looking to them for decisions, even sooner than they might have been prepared for, as Nicole shares:

> And that was definitely kind of delicate that summer when I wasn't officially on, I wasn't even on payroll…until well into September…I went to meetings, I met with people, I couldn't sign off on anything but obviously they were consulting me about things.

Jonathan shares a similar experience:

> There were about three people that sent me letters or emails, welcomed me and said, I'd love to meet you whenever, and that was very nice. That was very nice, when I think back on it, because in my other transitions from other jobs, I hadn't necessarily gotten that to the extent I got it here.

The findings from this study suggest that chairs who are hired externally may benefit from a "honeymoon" period where the faculty seem to go out of their way to be helpful to the incoming chair. While their transition may be made more difficult by having to acclimate to new institutional and departmental cultures, the chairs in this study suggest that faculty members in the department may be willing to give them the time to learn the role. As the next section reveals, that is not always the case with chairs who are selected from the faculty.

Transitions from the inside.

The chairs and heads who were hired internally experienced a range of transitions. Some had no time at all with their predecessor while others spent many hours meeting with the outgoing chair to go over the responsibilities of the position. Some outgoing chairs gave extensive files to the incoming chairs, but others left nothing behind, and in one extreme case, papers were actually shredded prior to the new chair starting. The findings of the study provide examples of transitions that are exceedingly smooth and others that are a litany of what institutions should never do.

Charlotte, who became head following the abrupt resignation of her predecessor, was left to fend for herself with no help from the outgoing department head:

> First time he [the outgoing head] had been reviewed in [many] years – that there had ever been a review. So it turned a bit dicey and, I mean, it was only constructive, I thought. But again, you're not on the receiving end. It was, what I assumed, were constructive things but it wasn't taken constructively and I was the deliverer of that, being the [department personnel committee] chair, which led to...I assume that was part of the reason for the resignation. And it was a very awkward situation because the vote wasn't going to be a negative vote. It was just constructive criticism. And so, because I was the messenger, that relationship completely broke down, to the point where, you know, I was supposed to move in to the office as of June 1 and as of June 15, I still hadn't. I couldn't get access to any files and things like that. And so I am doing the job for two weeks and I can't get anything so then I have to send a message to the dean like, I can't do this job and so it was really, there was no transition at all. Things had been shredded before I got in there so I didn't even have access to information I needed…It was a really rough transition.

Her exceedingly negative experience, while extreme, was unfortunately not unique. Of the 12 chairs and heads who participated in the study, five sought out and received extensive help from the former chairs. One had an offer of help from the outgoing chair but never took him up on it. Three others received only cursory help – in one case, a 90 minute meeting – while another three received none at all. As Pam, in answer to a query about if she had any time with the outgoing chair, sums up succinctly: "Nope. Just right in. Boom. He's out and I'm in." For those who had no assistance from the outgoing chairs, the reasons for the lack of help varied, from outgoing chairs retiring or going on sabbatical, making incoming chairs hesitant to bother them, or flat out refusals to help. Katherine, for instance, became chair when her predecessor suddenly quit in protest of not being named to an administrative position. He, unfortunately, took his anger out on Katherine and the department, at a time when she would have benefitted from his assistance:

> Yeah, it was really, really sad because...it was sad and it was incredibly difficult…I was pretty loyal to him the whole time and then, I had nothing to do with the fact that he didn't get selected and then he took it out on, not just me, but on everybody. No, I came into this… So, you know, yeah, I didn't know anything, I didn't know anything.

One chair, Peter, had access to their predecessor but no interest in reaching out to them. When he became chair of a social sciences department, he was given boxes and boxes of files by the outgoing chair which sat in a corner of his office: "Frankly, I haven't even looked at most of it. But it's there if I need it."

The length of time with their predecessors – if they had any – and the formality of the transitional period also varied widely from chair to chair. Ben's predecessor declined to spend any time at all with him, having apparently been grooming another faculty member who was not selected by the faculty to serve as chair. Jack was given a mere hour and a half of the outgoing chair's time while Michael spent time with his predecessor whenever he needed it. Maria, on the other end of the spectrum, enjoyed a unique situation in which she was named to the position a full year prior to becoming chair, which allowed her to negotiate a semester research leave with the dean. It also offered her and the outgoing chair a full semester to meet regularly and talk about a wide variety of departmental issues. Despite this extensive preparation, Maria still remembers feeling overwhelmed when she officially became chair:

> I had a pretty rough transition. My first year, despite [the former chair]'s intentions the previous year, and despite the fact that I knew a full year in advance that I was going to be chair and [the former chair] met with me as much as I wanted to, that last semester it was almost weekly meetings, but yet, that is not enough time to transfer the kind of knowledge that someone has after [many] years, so much of which becomes second nature that they don't even realize that they should tell you something about how something is done. And in his case, he went on a very much needed and deserved year long sabbatical in [another state] and so there were things that came up that first year where I desperately needed some guidance on how to do something and I couldn't reach him and there was no

> one to turn to and no one else in the department had been chair since 1987, no one currently in the department…So, I just realized that that transition was far bumpier than it should have been and you know, I managed to stay on top of it that first year but there were times where I really wanted to step down I just said, I don't know if I can handle this. I just thought, I don't, not that I can't handle this, I just don't know if I want to sacrifice you know, my family time, you know I was working very night until 11 or 12 o'clock and waking up the next day and never being able to pick up my son because that learning curve required that I first learn how to do everything and then do it.

The findings from this study suggest that leadership transitions are, at best, a haphazard process. While in some departments, a concerted effort is made to have a smooth transition, in others, it is almost as if the fact that a transition is taking place is simply ignored. It is clear that although there is a continuum along which transition success can be measured, the type of transition that occurs does not appear to follow rhyme or reason.

Resources for the chair.

During the transition stage, department leaders often seek help from people other than their predecessors. There is a wide range of resources for an incoming department leader, available both on- and off-campus. In this study, incoming chairs sought assistance and guidance from administrative staff members in the department and from colleagues – especially chairs – in other departments. Professional organizations also served as valuable resources.

Most often, it was the staff that the chairs turned to, as Charlotte states: "I wouldn't have been able to do the job without the staff and today I can't do the job without the staff." The incoming chairs recognize the expertise and institutional memory that the staff members provide. For Mark, having a long-time staff member as the office manager significantly eased his transition:

> I probably have relied more on [Caroline, the office manager] than anybody. [Caroline], what did we do in the past? Well, this is what we have done in the past. She doesn't tell me what to do. She says, this is what we did in the past. And then I'll sometimes say to her, did it work? No. Okay. And if she says yes, well then I figure we can't go wrong.

Many of the department leaders who were interviewed for the study had participated in a campus leadership development recently implemented for new heads and chairs. The program, which offered monthly workshops on critical topics like budget and personnel, also provided new chairs with the opportunity to meet other department leaders from across the campus. Maria explains why the program was so helpful to her:

> I have to say that the chair mentoring group really helped a lot because it's one thing to know what your predecessor did, it's another thing to know that there are other ways of doing things and get idea from other chairs, some of which fit in your department and some of which don't. But, that was so helpful, I can't tell you how important that was. Even though it was my second year, I was so overwhelmed the first year I don't even know if I could have taken it all in.

A small number of the department leaders sought help from their disciplinary professional organizations or national centers. For instance, Katherine attended separate conferences organized by the American Council on Education and her professional organization. Nicole benefited from a week-long seminar for chairs in her discipline. She describes why it helped her:

> It's a way in which people come, there are chairs from departments large and small, public and private, and there is a lot of therapeutic venting that goes on but you always take away a lot of really useful ideas and thoughts and information about trends in the field and enrollment patterns nationally, you know, the way people have approached the kinds of tensions that there tend to be a world of diminishing resources and how do you adjudicate these kinds of questions and what is the bigger picture.

Attending the national conference offered Nicole an opportunity to understand the larger dynamics and forces in play for her discipline at a national level. That helps her to have a stronger command of how best to position the department to take advantage of the current environment in her discipline. Having this knowledge also lets her know that other institutions are struggling with similar issues and the conference offers an opportunity to find out ways that other departments are addressing any problems.

While there were differences in the transitions for internal and external department leaders, and no clear transitional path even for internal heads and chairs, this study reveals that this stage of the leadership cycle is critical to helping new heads and chairs to understand their new responsibilities and to find their way in their new role.

Stage three: Leadership routinization

The leadership routinization stage of the leadership cycle is reached when the chair feels confident in their understanding of their role and, just as critically, the faculty members in the department have accepted that person in the leadership role. Such acceptance does not mean that the faculty members always agree with everything the chair does but that there is recognition of their authority as the department leader. It can be a time when the chair is most comfortable in performing the variety of duties and responsibilities and best understands the different roles a chair must fulfill. As Bess and Dee (2008) suggest, this is when a chair "concentrates on role performance for extended periods" (p. 258). It is the most static time in the department, although, as Bess and Dee note, "for organizations that operate in a turbulent environment…stabilization of roles may never be achieved" (p. 258). In other words, although the chair and the department are comfortable with the roles as defined, there may be other activity – such as a change in upper administration or budget crises – that prevent a true feeling of stability.

Pam, the long-time social sciences chair, explains how she learned how to best use the resources she had available in order to make the workload bearable:

> If you thought that you had to do everything, that the whole thing was yours, then I think it would be an incredible burden but our policies and procedures delegate responsibility, using the executive committee, etc. So if I had questions, I would bring it to the executive committee as an issue and we would talk about it and make some decision about it. And that's a very common thing.

Maria enjoys knowing that she has the power to have a positive impact on the department, a feeling enhanced by the fact that she is also an alumnae of the department: "Those are the things that are rewarding about being chair, about being able to affect change in a positive direction from something very small but that's a problem on a daily level to something big that is programmatic."

Michael, head of a hard sciences department nearing the end of his term, has reached the point where he knows what to expect from his faculty:

> The head does do a lot of things independently. I mean there are some decisions that just have to be made, some things happen very quickly and decisions have to be made. I find that the longer I am head, the more autocratic I become. But mostly because I know what everybody thinks about everything. I mean, if we are going to discuss something at a faculty meeting, I can tell you exactly what everybody is going to say.

Although it is at this stage that chairs understand and accept their role, their job is still not easy. They benefit from having a firm grasp on their role, but they still struggle to meet the potentially overwhelming demands of the position and feel tension between their faculty and administrative identities. Peter, chair of a social sciences department, shares his experiences:

> Sometimes I find it difficult, I will say. I find it difficult to carve out, I get up very early in the morning. You can just be eaten alive by your email….by email alone. You can just sink your whole life into that and that is part of the difficulty in sustaining the research. For instance, I will try to carve out, say Tuesday and Thursday morning for reading and writing and sort of research-related activities. But then things come up where, you know, [the dean] calls, can you meet for coffee on Thursday, and it's like, yeah, sure {laughter}. It's not ideally what I would like to [do], or whatever it is, those kinds of things come up that are sort of

> unavoidable. So that is the difficulty. I feel like you have much less control over your calendar.

For Charlotte, who has served for over a decade as head of an applied management field, the years of experience have helped her to now be comfortable with her leadership responsibilities. Yet, as higher education has evolved over the past decade and fundraising pressures have increased while state allocations have decreased, she has felt the role and expectations continue to change:

> It's all the stuff that we do that I was really surprised at the amount of those sorts of things that a chair has to do. And I know that every time I pick up a Chronicle of Higher Ed, chairs have to do more fundraising, and more development and more relationships and more of this but it just seems like in the last 10 years, it has grown exponentially. That surprises me, the amount of communication.

The interviews reveal that all but one of the department leaders have reached a point in their tenure where they know how to run the department and the department allows them to do so. Gaining a level of knowledge and comfort has offered the chairs greater confidence in their abilities to serve as chair. It is important to recognize, however, that even with a strong understanding of their role, their position is not an easy one. As prior research has shown, department chairs face tremendous pressure to juggle administrative and academic responsibilities (Gmelch, 2002a, 2004; Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Gmelch & Parkay, 1999; Seagren, Creswell, & Wheeler, 1993; Wolverton, Gmelch, Wolverton, & Sarros, 1999), made even more difficult by the fact that their administrative roles are often not strictly clarified (Gmelch, 2002a; Thomas & Schuh, 2004; Whitson & Hubert, 1982; Wolverton et al., 1999). Thus, while having reached a comfort level in understanding their roles, chairs still face many challenges.

Stage four: Anticipation of change

The cyclical nature of department leadership requires that, at some point, one chair steps down and another faculty member then serves as chair. This transition in leadership may be triggered by any number of factors, as varied as the chair's desire to return to his/her faculty activities or pressure from the dean to step down. The findings from this study suggest that, prior to the transition, there is a time period when chairs are actively thinking about leadership development efforts. While some chairs start planning for this from nearly their first day in the role – not because they are eager to stop being the chair but because it is in their nature to plan for the long-term future – others are triggered to do so by some action either inside or outside of the department. Some chairs think about stepping down in order to avoid going through a mandated review process. Others realize that they are missing their research and teaching and elect to return to the faculty full-time. Some are ready for retirement while, in other cases, either the faculty or the dean forces the chair out. Chairs start, if they haven't already, to think about who might be ready to serve as the next department leader and what skills are needed to do so. They might also begin to think about leadership development opportunities in the department as important tools for cultivating future leaders.

Identifying the necessary skills and temperament.

Having become confident in their role, chairs are in a better position to think about and understand the personality and skills needed to be chair. As Michael points out, it is not until you become a department leader that you are aware of what it means to be a department leader: "One thing I discovered is you know, you can be chairing all these committees and be involved in all these things but, until you are head, you really don't have a clue what goes on." The findings from this study reinforce the idea that chairs are in a unique position to guide leadership continuity efforts since they have the greatest ability to understand the position and what is needed.

The department leaders interviewed recognize the need for a chair to have the right temperament to handle the diverse set of responsibilities associated with the chair's role, especially when it comes to mediating conflict or guiding the department through difficult times. As Nicole notes,

> There are people who are temperamentally averse to taking on some major service things that put them in conflict with others. There are a number of colleagues who are really good and dedicated and great advisors and working well with students but who have shied away from chairing major committees or chairing the personnel committee because they do get very, very tense over anything that might lead to some form of conflict.

Pam echoes that sentiment, explaining:

> The people who want to do the job, and there are not too many, but the people who want to do the job probably shouldn't, because they don't have the right temperament for it. These are people who hold grudges, have long standing feuds and whatever, and that just doesn't play in this business. You have got to be very fair minded and open.

Other chairs emphasize the need for strong people skills in order to bring people together around common causes. Charlotte, when thinking about cultivating potential leaders, looks for those with altruistic motives: "When you are thinking about succession you've got to find somebody who is more interested in the department's success than their own ego." Peter also looks at people's motives and recognizes that it can be difficult to find somebody who has the right temperament *and* who is interested in serving in the role:

> I don't think most faculty love administration, to their credit. So, I don't think you are going to go around and find people who love to do this. It's a matter of finding people who are willing to do it and are willing to basically take a lot of

> their research off the table for a few years to be able to do that and that's not easy to do. Most people are sort of focused on themselves in academia. You might have noticed that {laughter}. So, you know, that's tricky. And also, the obvious combination of people who would be good at it and people who the department would want. So people who want to do it and the department wants and that intersection is sometimes small.

The findings from this study demonstrate that current chairs are thinking about these issues and paying attention to how faculty members in the department interact with each other. In addition, chairs are surprisingly mindful of the skills possessed by their faculty and whether or not they would have the technical ability to do the necessary work. Maria shares how this impacts who might be able to succeed her as chair:

> There are a couple of people who I think would be good at it, they are overwhelmed by the thought that they would get 60 to 100 emails a day which is typical and I send, on average I probably send about 60 emails a day. That just overwhelms them. Especially, if you think about the people who are senior to me and the IT world, the fact that I get sent Excel spreadsheets from the Dean's office to either look at our All Funds account or either look at the merit pay, you know, just that, completely intimidates some of the faculty. That they would be sent Excel files that would affect someone's salary, have to do something to it, and send back...that piece to me was not intimidating at all because I deal with Excel and spreadsheets and numbers and budgets all the time, but that piece is really intimidating and is an impediment to people wanting to be chair.

Chairs, having the unique experience of serving in the role, recognize that a particular skill set and personality can allow a chair to be more successful in moving a department forward.

Use of preparatory leadership roles.

It is during this stage that chairs look closely at critical leadership roles in the department as possible breeding grounds for future department leaders. While departmental governance structures vary, including whether or not there is an associate department chair position, departments typically have standing committees (e.g. personnel committee) and ad hoc committees (e.g. search committees) which provide leadership opportunities. Many chairs see these committees as practice runs for potential chairs – ways to give them leadership experience and get the faculty in the department used to seeing them in a leadership role. Other chairs use administrative appointments, such as graduate program director, to give a faculty member a leadership opportunity. In some departments, chairs have asked faculty to serve as acting chair during sabbatical leaves or over the summer, providing another leadership development opportunity. Pam had that experience when the former chair asked her to serve as acting chair during his sabbatical. She recognizes that the experience helped her when she became chair: "I had been chair before, an acting chair before, so it wasn't as if I was totally naïve to the job."

Maria, having served as acting chair in the past, sees the experience as a great learning tool, although she recognizes the limitations from her stint during the summer:

> We are hoping that some of the people who we really think would be capable realize that they are, you know maybe having someone else be acting chair will make that a little less daunting for some, if they see someone else doing it, who herself had some trepidation. I think getting people to be acting chair in the summer is also another way for people to then imagine themselves doing it. That is one way that I think [the former chair] seduced me into thinking I could do it {laughter}. I think I was acting chair two or three summers and of course it is less daunting in the summer but you get a taste of it, and you say, I could do this, you know I could do this. And then when September came, I was like oh my god, this isn't anything like what was going on in the summer!

Charlie, head of a professional department, is using committee chairships to offer leadership development opportunities to faculty in his department. He is quick to make it clear that these assignments not only give experience to the individual faculty member but also provide the faculty members in the department the opportunity to see that faculty member in a new light:

> Giving responsibilities to people and getting out of their way and letting them do it and see how they...often times, requiring them to spend substantial amount of time in front of the faculty…In our faculty meetings, I am not up there standing. People

> are coming up and leading conversations and so that is a way in which I think leadership can be...because the faculty have to be comfortable with people, be comfortable with listening to this person in a leading role.

Other chairs have followed similar paths. Michael, who is admittedly cultivating someone to succeed him, has utilized leadership opportunities in the department to help to convince the faculty that this person will be the right person to serve as the next chair. While he recognizes this faculty member's limitations, Michael also believes that this person will best be able to move the department forward and he has not hesitated to make that clear to his faculty colleagues:

> Well, I made him associate head. He'd been graduate program director for many years. I mean, he has always carried a good load in the department. He is a full professor. There's not a universal agreement that he is the obvious choice and I don't think we have many options left then. So right now there aren't many options. I look around at the senior faculty and they are just not head material. We wouldn't want them to be head. This, I think he would be fine. I don't think he would be a great head but the trajectory of the department is like this now, it's not like this crashing plane. It's really upward.

Katherine, who hopes to serve as chair of her department for several more years, has started to think about how an associate chair position, which the department does not currently have, can provide a path for a future chair:

> I think, and I have thought about this as we have gotten bigger, that I think at some point we need an associate chair and sort of see that person, probably would assign them certain tasks that a chair would normally would do and have that be the person who would transition into the chair. But start off with almost a more formal title and formal set of responsibilities that would then allow him or her to transition easier. It certainly wasn't done for me.

For some chairs, the cultivation of future leaders is not directly connected to their plans to step down as chair. Instead, they seek a better sense of the leadership abilities of their faculty colleagues by appointing them as chairs of critical committees and then observing how they handle serving in a position of authority. Peter, chair of a social sciences department in his second year, describes his early cultivation efforts:

> It's amazing, you learn a lot about people when they are in positions of some authority. People have this weird relationship to so called power and for some people, I don't know, they can be sort of taken over by it in a funny kind of way. So I guess, I'm not sure, I haven't thought too much about that. The other sort of positions of authority are things like chairing search committees, you know, things where you have to communicate complex things and engage people and sort of seeing how well, both how people in authority can engage with faculty and how effective they are at getting things done. Can they make it happen because, it's academia, there's lots of talk, but can you make it happen? Can you bring some idea to fruition and you know, that's very revealing when you see people in positions...it's very easy to criticize but when you get there, can you do anything. So, I think that is what I look for – doers.

His efforts have been rewarded, as he has observed how two faculty members have responded to leadership positions:

> What I am doing now...is putting people in leadership positions who I think would be effective and seeing how they do. I would say, a couple of people that I am thinking of now have learned a lot, about one who I think even more strongly that she'd be great and about another that I am not so sure anymore.

In some cases, the use of preparatory roles makes it clear to the faculty member that they are not interested in taking on a leadership position. That was the situation that Maria faced when she asked a colleague to serve as acting chair one summer:

> There is always the danger that if you give people opportunities like that, they will discover that there is no way they want to be chair. I mean that is what happened last summer where I had someone as acting chair and they decided they did not want to deal with the social conflict piece. Well, if you are going to be chair, you are going to be in that position and if you are not willing to say, like I did, go out and read a book, figure out how to manage that, if you are not willing to do that and you just say, you know what, this is not for me, I guess it is better you find out when you are in a position of acting chair in the summer than when you are in the middle of the semester and then you feel you can't quit. So, I guess there probably are people who just decide that they don't want that kind of role. But, on the other hand, who if they are associate chair, assistant chair, I don't know what people call that role, but that they may say, well, you know, this is really doable, I get this.

For Ben, chair of a hard sciences department, the idea of cultivating leaders extends beyond just finding one to be a future chair. In fact, he is quite uncomfortable with the idea of a chair cultivating a successor, saying that, "I don't think the head should anoint their successor. All that does is lock in a way of being…I think the best you can do is promote general authority and allow people in leadership positions to exercise it." He focuses less on individual leadership roles and more on empowering all of his faculty so that everyone feels they play a part in moving the department forward. While the other chairs all seem to be focused on cultivating future heads and chairs, Ben has taken a unique approach to how he runs his department: "I think that I am cultivating a department gestalt and that everyone is aware of their responsibility and their role within the department and everyone is encouraged to generously contribute to this thing which is their working space."

As the findings show, there is a wide range of roles that chairs can utilize to promote leadership development. Whether it is a chairing a departmental committee or serving as acting chair during a summer, the use of preparatory leadership roles as breeding grounds for potential chairs allows both that person and the faculty in the department to measure their leadership capacity and interest.

Planting seeds.

At this point, department chairs are often "planting seeds" – encouraging others to think about serving as chair. While chairs have utilized the various preparatory roles to test out potential leaders, they have not always done so in a way that make it explicitly clear to the faculty member that they were being groomed for the chair's role. It is at this stage when the chair starts to make that more explicit. Sometimes this is because the chair intends to step down soon and wants the faculty to start thinking about leadership continuity. In other cases, the chair is eager for the department to plan for long-term leadership continuity and so encourages them to think about these issues early into his/her tenure as chair. The department leaders have employed different methods of accomplishing this but all have the common goal of starting the conversation about who would next serve as chair.

Some chairs, like Ben who feels strongly that chairs should not be involved in picking their successor, have taken steps to make sure their colleagues are thinking about leadership continuity. Nearing the end of his term as chair, Ben has recently and purposefully told his faculty his thoughts on when he might step down so that they could begin the conversations about who would serve as the next chair, even though he does not plan to resign as chair for at least eighteen months. On the other end of the spectrum, Charlie, despite only being in his second year as chair, quite deliberately has already raised the issue of succession with his faculty:

> In fact, at last year's retreat, I did a clicker survey and I am trying to think if I did even ask that question…I did ask, would anybody aspire to be the next head? And surprisingly, I think six out of thirty said yes which is very, very surprising…Actually, I don't think I can underestimate the power of doing this clicker things and for people to see these results.

Charlie feels strongly that, in addition to raising the issue of leadership continuity publicly, it is also essential to do it repeatedly:

> To actively ask and talk about the big elephant in the room. Are you interested in being a leader? I think doing that. But asking it not once but asking it once now and then follow it up with some type of leadership opportunities and then following up with that question. So it is kind of I think a continuing conversation.

Others, like Pam, have deliberately chosen not to have public discussions about who would serve as the next chair simply because they are not sure what they themselves want to do and when they might decide to step down. Pam, the longest-serving chair interviewed who is unsure of her future plans, has not yet spoken with faculty who she thinks might make good chairs, although she intends, when she is ready, “to have a general discussion with them about the job and the fact that they should think about it.”

Several chairs have stated that they want to bring other people into the decision making process so that they could get a sense of what a chair did. Charlotte sees this as critical to cultivating leaders: “Having their ideas be a part of it so that they could see what really goes on that the average faculty member doesn't know that you are dealing with on a daily basis.” That being said, she still has concerns about the added workload of cultivating someone: “You know, Nancy, part of it is just, you go through the day-to-day.”

The study’s findings suggest that it is at this critical stage when chairs become most cognizant of the role they can play in cultivating future leaders of the department. Through conversation and action, department leaders proactively seek out faculty members to encourage them to think about serving in a leadership role. Chairs then provide opportunities for these faculty members to explore their leadership abilities by appointing them to critical roles in the department. These actions by the current department chairs help to get the department ready for a future transition in leadership.

Stage five: Preparing for the transition

Departments reach the last stage of the leadership cycle when the chair formally announces his/her intention to step down. This may be the result of a poor evaluation, at the request of the faculty and/or dean, or simply because they are ready to move onto a new role or return to their faculty responsibilities. While the department may take steps to begin the leadership cycle anew, by naming a search committee and developing a call for nominations, the outgoing chair may also have goals for what the transition will look like. The goal is often to prepare the department to make the leadership transition with the minimal amount of disruption to the department's activity. The chairs who participated in the study typically plan to spend time with the incoming chair to help ease the transition for the incoming chair. As Ben states,

> Ideally, there should be a transition time during which the new chair interacts with the old chair to learn the range of duties of the position. Ideally, whoever is going to be chair should be very aware of the structure and problems associated with each unit in the department and then take their own creative approach to continuing. That would be the best way.

Charlie echoes this sentiment, stating,

> Let's say I go six years, that maybe in the fourth year, that a successor, or successors, are identified and they work in some way with the department head in the sixth year. So that they hit the ground with a year already under the belt. Overlap is good.

In departments where the next chair might be hired from outside the campus, chairs still see a critical importance in planning for the transition in order to keep things moving in the department. Jonathan, who does not currently foresee sufficient leadership capacity within the department to hire the next chair from on-campus, envisions a plan where the role of chair will simply be added to the hiring plan and the department will know when to expect the search and hire to happen. He will also make the transition happen in a transparent fashion so that the faculty will have confidence in a smooth progression:

> Oh, well, if we are visioning the best thing that could happen in a transition year, that they would very easily see and probably how I would do it, I would actually create a timeline with specific things that the new person would be doing or learning about and so the faculty could see that in this transition year, in this month, this is what is happening. And if they are aware of that, that can help

> them get a good sense that it looks like this new person is getting a good transition here.

Jack, the head who stepped down after a year and a half in the face of extreme opposition from senior faculty in the department, has been involved in the national search to find his replacement. With the new department leader expected to arrive on campus in a couple of months, Jack is already engaging with him to bring him up to speed on the department's activities:

> I am actually keeping in pretty good, I wouldn't say day-to-day, contact...I am in frequent contact. I am probably going to start increasing my contact with him now. I have had some long discussions with him at the national conference this summer. Both [the former associate head] and I sat down with him and said, this is what you are facing, these are the issues.

Most of the chairs hope to be able to have time with their successor in order to brief them on the critical issues facing the department, along with the mundane aspects of being chair including budget and personnel deadline, etc. For Michael, his hope is to have developed sufficient leadership capacity in the department in the next few years:

> Now we are having this calm, sensible transition to the next head and there are lots of people who are coming up through the ranks who would be fine heads and we can, as the department recovers and as we can cover our teaching loads and we can rebuild some critical mass and research and we become more functional and a little older, it just becomes easier and easier to run the department. As you have more ex-heads who can help you be head, right? The next head will have [the former head] and I to help him. And three years later, there will be three ex-heads and since we are all fairly young, we can reach a point where there are four, five, six ex-heads in the department. And these people know how to do things and they can do things for you and it just...we will just reach a point where we run our own affairs…Yeah, I think more people are aware of this now but we're still young. I think we are going to get an internal head and three, four, five years from now, we're going to be in really good shape in that regard because a lot of these...you know, I see a lot of younger people coming up through the ranks who are very stellar scientists and teachers but also very good citizens who could just step up and do this for three years.

The preparation for the next transition helps to set the stage for the future chair. Currents chairs are aware of the role that they can play to make it as smooth a transition as possible both for the incoming leader and the department.

This study identifies five stages of department leadership – the search for a chair, the transition, leadership routinization, anticipation of change, and preparation for transition – that can impact, both positively and negatively, efforts of leadership continuity. If there is a disruption in one stage, it can influence how that chair then thinks about the future stages of the leadership cycle. For instance, a department leader who experienced a difficult transition, like Charlotte who was locked out of her office for the first two weeks, might approach the next transition in a very deliberate manner in order to avoid history repeating itself. Furthermore, what happens in the early stages of the leadership cycle can then influence what happens in a later phase. Katherine, for instance, was thrown into the position with no help from the former chair and now plans to create an associate chair position in order to avoid a similar situation in the future. The departmental leadership cycle provides a framework that institutions can use when planning for leadership continuity.

Individual Leadership Dimension: The current chair's influences

The final dimension to be examined is the individual leader, namely the current chair. While process and context are important elements of leadership continuity efforts, it is the current chair who plays a critical role in a department's ability to develop its future leaders. Their role is made even more essential by the sheer uniqueness of his/her position, which is shaped by disciplinary, institutional and departmental cultures, in addition to the individual characteristics that they bring to the position. For instance, a chair of mathematics at a research institution has a different experience than a chair of management at the same institution. That same chair has a different experience than chairs of mathematics at other research institutions. The unique culture of each department as an intersection of disciplinary and organizational cultures provides each chair with a singular perspective and experiences within and across all departments. In addition, the chair is shaped by his/her prior experiences at the same time that s/he is influencing the department and its future.

This study identifies fundamental formal and informal roles played by chairs with a particular emphasis on how those roles relate to and influence leadership continuity efforts. However, these roles and how each chair enacts them are influenced by a variety of personal factors that are shaped, as described in the following section, by prior leadership experiences, their need to balance competing priorities both at work and at home, and the ways in which they understand their roles in relation to the expectations of their faculty colleagues within their departments.

Prior leadership experience

Chairs come to the role with differing levels of preparation. Some department leaders have served as associate chair or head while others played leadership roles in their professional organizations. Chairs also gain experience through formal and informal roles, but, as this study highlights, even the formal roles, such as associate chair, are defined differently by different disciplines. These experiences impact how they think about their own transition to the role, which in turn influences how they think about and approach leadership continuity efforts.

The level of experience of those interviewed varies widely, from almost no experience to nearly two decades served as chair at other institutions. Nearly all of the heads and chairs had served as associate chair, acting chair or director of a center. Only two had not served in any of these roles although they had chaired key committees, including the department personnel committee. When Charlotte became chair, she had only been tenured for a couple of years and had served as chair of the department personnel committee. But, as the department faced upheaval, her colleagues began looking to her to play a leadership role, despite her lack of experience. As she explains,

> And what was happening at the time is that there was some challenges in the department and what was happening was, even though I was young, I was the more senior member, people were just ending up in my office complaining and wanting me to resolve things and I ended up trying to be the mediator on some issues…So I think it kind of happened that way because the people that I worked with at the time really trusted my judgment and it just evolved. Again, it was something that I wasn't prepared for. It wasn't something that I wanted to do. It was kind of just like the team said, you need to go in and coach. And I happened to be there at the time and the only person with tenure other than this other person. So, no, I had no training. I had no preparation.

Given that they sought her out for advice and guidance, it seems that Charlotte's faculty colleagues were not bothered by her lack of formal experience. Instead, they appear to have recognized leadership qualities in her and consequently sought her out for a leadership role. Michael, who had served in the formal role of associate head for two years and as chair of many internal committees, also saw himself as an unofficial leader of the department:

> I had kind of informally been associate head for quite a long time…I was head of the PC [the personnel committee] then quite a lot and some other things. I ran some big searches for [a former head] and she and I just kind of talked a lot, figured out how to get things done. I'd always been, I'd been on the PC for ten years, I was head of the PC for five years, I did a lot of, chaired a lot of committees for restructuring, curricular changes, a lot of things like that.

Some chairs had led standing and ad hoc committees while others, like Pam, had played leadership roles in professional organizations. Jonathan, with perhaps the most experience of the participants, brought extensive knowledge and real world experience to his new role as chair, having served as chair at another institution for more than 15 years.

In some departments, formal roles did not necessarily mean extensive experience. Mark, for instance, served for many years as the associate chair of his hard sciences department. As he explains, however, in his department the responsibilities of that role are quite limited:

> I mean, I was associate chair for 14 years, and that's all I ever did was sign papers. Or attend meetings when [the former chairs were unavailable]…I think in the sciences, that is what it is in the associate chair. They don't do much except sign. I shouldn't say that. In [this department], that seems to be the way it is.

In other departments, the associate chair or head played a much larger role in the decision-making processes in the department. In Charlie's department, the associate head plays a larger role in curricular issues while the graduate and undergraduate program directors in Katherine's department have "full reign to manage and run those programs as they see fit."

The findings from this study demonstrate the wide variety of experiences that chairs and heads bring to the leadership role. The range of experience – from committee chairs to stints as acting or associate chairs – help to prepare the department leaders. In addition, how they ascend to the position may influence how they use leadership roles to cultivate others. Charlotte, for instance, did not serve as an associate head but, as the department head, uses that role to cultivate future leaders. Chairs bring with them the sum total of their experiences, no matter how formal or extensive those experiences might have been. The study also suggests that, while there is not a clear path to the department chair position, there are particular roles that can help a potential leader to gain experience and a clearer understanding of the department leader's responsibilities. This can help to then make leadership continuity efforts more effective since an incoming chair will have a better sense of what is expected of them.

Balancing roles and competing priorities

As prior research has explored extensively, department heads and chairs face a difficult time trying to balance the many priorities competing for their limited time. These competing forces include meeting the dueling demands of faculty and administrative roles. Chairs often try to maintain their faculty identities, continuing their research and teaching, while balancing the administrative responsibilities of the chair's position. In addition, many must then juggle their professional and personal lives. For chairs with families, this adds another layer of tension to an already stressful position. The chairs, while struggling to maintain their faculty identities, master their leadership roles and balance a personal life, think about their own struggles and their impact on their health and well-being and take those experiences into account when thinking about future leadership transitions.

Many chairs face the challenge of handling the administrative demands of their role while also seeking to continue their teaching and research activities. Peter, chair of a social science department, shares his difficulties at maintaining his faculty identity:

> Well, I have a reduced teaching load but I like teaching so it is sort of bittersweet. It is nice to have more time but I miss the contact with other students so, as I say, it's good and bad in that sense. Research is hard, I find it very difficult to sustain. I can do sort of short things, articles, I've got a book that I am editing with [a colleague] that is coming out in a few months.

Lessons from her predecessor weigh on Maria, an associate professor who is determined to be promoted to full professor in a timely fashion, and have shaped her thinking about her tenure as chair.

> And there is also the burnout and regret factor. I mean, [the former chair] sat me down and said, I really regret that I did not step down sooner because now I am standing here and I am, this is at the time when he was in his 60s, and he said, that was my identity for more than a decade and I have let my research go, I've let my teaching go, I'm in a classroom, I'm doing all these preps and I feel like, that is what I went into academia for and now I have completely let that go. So, I said to [the dean] when I first took this on, after six years, either send me up or send me down because I am not staying beyond the six {laugher}. I am really adamant about that.

Other department leaders feel pressure to serve as role models for their colleagues. Charlotte, for instance, feels strongly that she needs to be just as productive as her faculty colleagues. In pushing herself, she is very aware of the toll such pressure has taken on her own well-being:

> Last year, I just made a commitment. I was trying to up the production of research in our department and it felt like I can't tell, I can't really ask everybody to do it if I am not doing it. So I just set a goal of getting work out and I actually got a textbook and two articles done last year. And I was almost dead by the end of the year. My husband was like, people say how's [Charlotte] and I say, oh, she's going to be dead by the end of the month. Because literally, I was going on three to four hours of sleep for an entire year. It was just nuts. But I felt like I had to do that because I had been out of the production of research and I miss that and you know, it's just that, that's something I really...it's a cost, a huge cost, to doing this.

Her determination, while impressive, has had a clear impact on her health and well-being. Maria, in trying to understand the nuances of her new position, also pushed herself to the brink of sounds physical health:

> I learned to not take it all so personally because it emotionally then can effect you, when you suddenly feel like oh my god…I lost sleep, I had insomnia that first year because I would stay up at night worrying about some of these things and writing notes on a pad at my bedside. You know my husband was going to get me to quit any time.

Jack’s often-contentious year and a half as department head has had a detrimental impact on his health, a concern for chairs and institutions alike. As he notes, “It’s not been…I will have to also be honest with you on one other thing, my health has deteriorated during this time and I have to take care of myself.”

Throughout the interviews, the chairs share about the difficulty of balancing the demands of the chair’s role with their home life. Maria has a young child at home and struggles to maintain a resemblance of balance in her life:

> And it is such an all-consuming job. Just doing your chair work could easily fill 40 or more hours a week and then if you have a life outside or a family, when do you do the research or the teaching and the grad advising, which I have been doing all of that.

Michael, the long-time head of a hard sciences department, speaks often about the need to look for department leaders who don’t have young children at home. His insistence on the importance of this is shaped by his own experience, accepting the head’s position when he had young daughters at home. He has thought extensively about this issue and seems to come to terms with his experience and its impact on his life:

> And I suggest rereading Kafka…I was rereading Kafka and, you know, when you are young, you have this real sense of order and you're young and you read this stuff. You read about all the alienation and you know fighting against the machine and you feel this anger and now, 30 years later, after having kids and being an administrator for six or seven years, you know, I look and I just say, you know, this guy is a wimp. I think the real problem with Kafka's protagonists and probably Kafka himself is that you know he can't accept the insanity that is essential to human nature. I have come to accept that. I don't know if that is being an administrator or having kids and they are very similar processes… So it's just, I've just learned to accept. You know, irregular life, lack of sleep...With kids, it's just total exhaustion, you get that totally burned out feeling like you know, you don't sleep for six weeks or something, six months. With the head, it is waking up at night, you realize that you've got 10,000 problems and it possesses your brain and you find yourself thinking about, oh, this faculty member is fighting with my staff person here or this person has an outside problem, there's this problem or this space isn't getting down and you know, it

> completely possesses your mind. Three, four years of that is enough. Seven is too much. No one should be head for this long. Anyway, I guess, I have sorted adapted to the insanity...order, I don't need that. My house is a mess, Legos everywhere.

The chairs in this study all recognize the difficulty of serving in a leadership role while trying to continue those activities that brought them to academia in the first place, namely, teaching and research. The added burden of maintaining a personal life increases the balancing act for many department leaders.

Leadership style

Much of the focus thus far has been on how the department context and leadership cycle impact leadership continuity efforts. A critical piece that should not be overlooked is the influence that the current chair wields. What the chair does – and how s/he does it – matters. The chair serves as a catalyst for jumpstarting efforts in the department to enhance leadership capacity and their own personal style plays a role in how effective leadership continuity activities can be. If, for instance, a chair has a tendency to do all the work on their own, then faculty members may see the job as onerous and efforts for smooth leadership transitions might be difficult. If a chair is in a weak position, it may also impact their ability to seek leadership continuity.

Maria followed a long-time chair who had a tendency to do anything and everything. When Maria assumed the role of chair, she actively sought to engage and empower her colleagues:

> So, one of the things that I have tried to do is involve the other faculty more in the kinds of things that the chair does or the chair did…I think most of them, I was very explicit about it and I think that is important because if I had just started doing it, it could have been perceived as, why is she sloughing all this work on us, you know. And I was very explicit about it, explicit about the fact that I found the task overwhelming at times and that we needed to think about ways that other people would be willing and able to do the job but also investing the whole

> department in a lot of these long term issues because, you just can't, it won't work if you rest that on one person. So, I was explicit about it and I think most of the department really embraced it and thrived under that and I think I have seen, we have seen some exciting changes come out of that."

Maria's goal is to involve the faculty members more and more in the running of the department so that future chairs will understand that they do not need to do all the work themselves. Charlotte faces the same struggles, especially after an evaluation in which her faculty members raised their concerns about her doing too much:

> Basically, what they say is more positives than negatives and they basically say that we don't want you to leave but you are going to burn yourself out. So you need to delegate more, but then when I delegate more, a combination of everybody has other things to do already because we're short, it doesn't get done and so then I end up doing it anyway. So it is easier to just do it myself, you know {laughter}.

For Charlie, head of a professional department with a history of having sub-fields pitted again each other, his open leadership style has helped to bring people together in a new way that he thinks will positively affect the next leadership transition:

> I think in the past, we as a department, we would, when we went through a head change, we would want to, there was a reason, we wanted the head to come in and do something different for us because maybe we weren't quite happy with how we felt about ourselves. But I think that past leadership in our department has gotten, has helped to flatten the department so we don't have these silos. We are talking to each other. There is a lot of interdisciplinary research and that's a perfect environment now I think to have a leadership model that really is more collaborative and allows people to take larger roles in important decisions and it is easier in that department to start to cultivate who is going to be the next steward of this thing.

Other chairs have used their individual leadership style to empower all faculty members in the department, almost to the point where leadership becomes moot. As Ben explains,

> We have several leaders each with different responsibilities who jointly report to the department head and the faculty at monthly faculty meetings. I'd also like to think that we all are on one page with respect to the responsibilities of

> disseminated authority, i.e. that no one abuses his/her position and that if any leader steps down or is removed, everything would continue to function efficiently until we appoint a new leader to that position.

Department leaders approach their roles in different ways, which in turn can impact how the faculty members view the role of chair or head. The chair's individual leadership style has the capacity to have a direct influence on leadership continuity efforts.

The chair's role in shaping perceptions

While faculty members have their own perception of the role, the chair does as well. And given the chair's unique holistic perspective, the chair is in a position to both understand the larger dynamics at play in any department and to recognize the nuances of the chair's position, whereas individual faculty members may not.

Pam clearly understands the unique position that she holds as the chair and how it gives her a perspective others might not have, while still recognizing the faculty's role in picking the next chair:

> You need certain combinations of skills that make you more efficient but a lot of people can be chair and I think it's worthwhile for people to know when I feel they can be chair because I probably have a better sense of the skill set than almost anybody else. That said, again, it's going to be a departmental proposition.

Nicole, who was hired externally to lead a multi-disciplinary humanities department, has thought about what combination of experience and skills the next chair might need:

> I think if there was a sense...well, there would be two things that would be needed. One, whoever is going to do this I think does need to have a strong profile as a scholar, just to have the respect, to seem like a legitimate advocate. And yet, also, it is somebody who is going to have to have people skills and be willing to listen and be seen as probably more important than anything else, not partial to any one program. That's why it was probably very helpful of me to come in from the outside.

In other departments, chairs recognized a chasm between the faculty's perception of the role and what reality was. They then actively sought to change the faculty's perception to bring it closer to reality. As Charlotte explains,

> You know, there are all sorts of things that just happen and they don't really realize, whether it is something as mundane as the scheduling process to as exciting as putting on an alumni event or interviewing people for the newsletter or whatever it is that we have to do.

Maria saw this division between perception and reality as potentially detrimental to the department:

> I'll be frank with you, there are a couple of people, probably only two, who think that they could be chair but I don't think that they have the skills to be able to really pull it off. And I think that that if they were thrust into the position, they would crumble. So, if you are able to give them an opportunity to try it out in some small way where the stakes are lower, I think they would discover that it is not this all-powerful position with very little work {laughter}.

Department leaders are aware of the vast differences between how the faculty see the role and what the role of chair really is. In order to engage faculty in leadership continuity efforts, the chairs interviewed have first taken steps to bring perception and reality closer together.

The findings from this study have identified a key perspective that must be included in any study of leadership continuity: the current department leader. The individual leader is in a unique position to understand and motivate the faculty around leadership continuity efforts. The implications of these latent roles will be explored further in chapter five.

Overall, there are three critical dimensions to leadership continuity efforts: the context, including the history of department leadership and particular demographical factors that influence how departments approach leadership continuity; the process, including the department leadership cycle which provides a framework for looking at how leadership changes over time in a department; and, finally, the individual leader, namely the current chair who is in a unique position to influence leadership cultivation in the department. The findings from this study suggest a process that, while not as intentional as leadership succession, plays out in a consistent pattern across disciplines, across departments, across time and across individuals. These three dimensions are unique to each individual department but, when drawn together, they create a complex picture of the ways that the interplay among context, process and person determines if and how leadership continuity efforts will occur in a department.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

Introduction

Previous research has explored the difficult position that many chairs find themselves in: often unprepared for their new job and thrown into the role with little or no training, department chairs must quickly find out how to meet the many expectations that are placed upon them while also balancing their academic activities and personal lives (Gmelch, 2002a; Thomas & Schuh, 2004; Whitson & Hubert, 1982; Wolverton, Gmelch, Wolverton & Sarros, 1999). The constant juggling of administrative responsibilities with teaching and research often leads chairs to question their own identity: faculty member or administrator. The resulting role conflict and ambiguity cause stress and tension for many chairs (Gmelch, 2002a; Thomas & Schuh, 2004; Whitson & Hubert, 1982; Wolverton et al., 1999). The precarious nature of a new chair's experience is made even more so by the critical role they play in the overall academic institution. Chairs are influential in directing the academic curriculum, developing and supporting faculty at all ranks, and planning for the future, often with limited financial resources (Aziz, Mullins, Balzer, Grauer, Burnfield, & Lodato, 2005; Benoit, Graham & Heiman, 2002; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Seagren, Crewell, & Wheeler, 1993; Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt, 2005).

Although existing literature has clearly identified the importance of and challenges associated with being chair, there is little empirical evidence indicating how best to improve this vital, yet challenging, leadership position. This study advances prior research by providing additional insights into the roles that chairs play and exploring the strategies they use in developing leadership capacity at the departmental level. Hence, the findings from this study provide empirically-based insights about ways to improve departmental leadership by better understanding the ways in which the cultivation, selection, and transition of department chairs can be better understood and more intentionally guided as part of a larger leadership continuity process that takes multiple dimensions into account – including the unique context of each department, the temporal process through leadership evolves, and the specific experience of each chair.

Given the seemingly transient nature of the role of chair – the high turnover in the department chair role and the knowledge that many department leaders simply return to the faculty following their term as chair (Seagren et al., 1993) – an argument could be made against investing in leadership at this level. After all, when institutions are experiencing unprecedented budgetary constraints and limited human resources, one might argue that there is little return on the investment of time and money at the department level. However, strong institutions must have strong departments, which in turn must have strong, competent, and prepared leaders. Leadership continuity is not limited to the notion of creating one strong leader. Indeed, it is the cultivation of leadership capacity within a department, not an individual – a critical distinction between leadership continuity and leadership succession. By creating departments with strong leaders, institutions are strengthening their core. If institutions invest in and improve leadership at the department level, institutions are not just creating stronger departments but are enhancing the institution's leadership capacity across the campus.

The 12 department heads and chairs who participated in this study provide initial evidence of the some of the best and worst things a department and institution can do in terms of preparing departments for leadership transition. As individual stories, they stand alone as examples of unprepared leaders, difficult transitions, and challenging experiences. When viewed together, however, the narratives provided by these chairs reveal a pattern of behavior by department leaders who seek to improve leadership continuity and capacity in the department as a means of facilitating greater departmental achievement and extending the benefits of their leadership beyond their individual roles as leaders. Chairs, sitting at the intersection of institution, department and discipline, have the advantage of possessing a more holistic vantage point from which to both understand the differing cultures (disciplinary and organizational) and know how best to work within and across those cultures.

This study reveals department leaders who are engaged in leadership continuity efforts, which, unlike succession planning, are not designed to merely select one person to be their successor but instead to help develop leadership capacity in the department and, in doing so, facilitate leadership transitions that best provide for the ongoing needs of the department. Leadership continuity is a complex approach to expanding leadership capacity through three distinct yet connected dimensions: context, process, and person.

This study was initially guided by the question, how do department chairs think about their own succession? Through the process of data analysis, it quickly became apparent that leadership succession, as it has been defined in the more traditional management literature, is not appropriate in the unique organizational and governance structures found within higher education. Shared governance simply does not lend itself to a chair picking his/her own successor. Department leaders in this study, however, are actively engaged in thinking about and planning for future leadership transitions. In fact, it is clear from the results of this study, that these chairs are largely focused on **leadership** continuity that extends beyond focusing on who the next **leader** is and focuses on how best to provide on-going leadership for their academic units. This finding reflects the unique nature of higher education and provides insights into how and why a focus on individual leader succession does not work in higher education; yet current leaders and their faculty colleagues can work towards providing on-going leadership that spans what are often difficult transitions that thrust under-prepared individuals into highly ambiguous and stressful leadership roles. The best practices that emerge from a careful analysis across these 12 cases indicate ways that the findings from this study can be used to begin facilitating better leadership continuity in academic departments.

As noted earlier, leadership continuity is a more complex, multi-dimensional approach that is focused on enhancing leadership capacity for the department as a whole, as opposed to the cultivation and development of leader capacity in just one individual. In leadership succession planning, there is an implicit understanding that the outgoing leader is directly involved through the use of influence in selecting his/her own successor despite not being formally responsible for doing so. The unique nature of higher education and its tenet of shared governance, however, make a direct exercise of authority by the chair to select his/her own successor untenable. Rather, leadership continuity is a reciprocal process of influence in which faculty members also play an essential role in decision-making about not only who will lead them, but about how they will be led. Concurrently, department leads are actively engaged in leadership continuity development in which they work to increase and improve the leadership capacity in the department and more informally influence the nature and outcome of future leadership.

Figure 4: Map of Leadership Continuity Dimensions

This study contributes to existing knowledge by providing a map that helps departments and institutions to plan for future leadership by informing policy and practice (See Figure 4). The foundation of this map lies in the three dimensions – context, process, and person – each of which are dynamic in their own way. The following sections outline the impact of each dynamic and provide policy and practice recommendations that are designed to facilitate and enhance leadership continuity efforts in academic departments. Finally, the chapter offers proposals for future research that will further advance the knowledge in this crucial area.

Context

Understanding the context within which an organizational unit operates is necessary for developing strategies for future success. To change an organization, you first must understand that organization (Kezar, 2001). In this multiple case study, the context includes wide ranging factors such as the rank distribution of the faculty in the department and how the faculty perceived the role of chair. The context – and the varying factors that create it – is unique to each individual department. Every participant in the department is impacted and shaped by the culture of the department, institution and discipline. While each department will have its own culture and organizational structure, all chairs – whether they come from within the department or are hired from elsewhere – must operate within the context of their department at their institution at a specific moment in time.

Department culture and context are strong forces (Morgan, 1996) and can be difficult to change. For instance, changing the distribution of faculty ranks in a department only occurs over long stretches of time. Given the length of time it takes to be tenured and then promoted to full professor, it is nearly impossible to see dramatic demographic changes without a sudden and substantial influx of funding to hire new faculty at all ranks. Reflective of the current economic realities, and the receding state support that many public institutions are experiencing (Field, 2008; Wolverton, 2008), it is unlikely that many departments will receive any such windfall. Other contextual factors, like faculty perception, are also difficult to change although a chair, as Maria's experience in trying to alter how the faculty view the responsibilities and roles of the chair demonstrates, can take steps to shift their perception.

Distribution of rank

The findings from this study highlight the dramatic impact that years of budget feast-or-famine cycles have had on faculty hiring patterns at Snow Mountain University (SMU). The lack of sufficient numbers of senior associate professors and young full professors has clearly altered how department chairs think about who they can cultivate as a future leader. Most chairs who participated in this study looked to cultivate future leaders from either the full professors or senior associate professors, understanding that they would be at a stage in their career where they could take on the demands of such a role. The current economic crisis places this issue in an even harsher light, as most institutions will not having the funding to make significant investments in their faculty (Blumenstyk, 2009a). While, at SMU, the large corps of current assistant professors will provide a substantial cohort of potential department leaders in the future, the lack of active hiring of new assistant professors right now will lead to another leadership famine cycle in the future. In addition, faculty members progress at differing rates with some racing towards promotion to full professor and others content to remain an associate professor. Despite the fact that chairs play a crucial role in faculty development (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy & Beach, 2006), they cannot control how quickly an associate professor will progress and when they might be ready – and willing – to serve in a leadership role.

At SMU, departments play close attention to the distribution of faculty rank when making recommendations for promotions to associate and full professor, in accordance with the academic personnel policy. As the policy states, “For personnel recommendations and decisions consideration must be given to the relationship of the recommended personnel action to…flexibility as affected by rank and tenure distributions and anticipated retirement dates" (Academic Personnel Policy, 1981, p. 6). While this policy is in place, it is not clear that faculty and department leaders think about the potential impact that the distribution of faculty rank may have on leadership capacity when making tenure and promotion recommendations. Although it would be inappropriate to make such decisions based primarily on future leadership capacity, departments would be well advised to include such consideration when making decisions about the timing of personnel reviews, especially to full professor, and when making personnel recommendations.

Departments plan extensively for faculty hiring, but do not often think long-term about the leadership of the department. A further recommendation is for departments to consider leadership capacity when creating hiring plans. Doing so offers an opportunity for departments to have ongoing conversations about leadership, instead of waiting until a leadership change is needed. Such explicit planning, as Jonathan plans to incorporate into his department, allows departments to be strategically positioned, regardless of what crises might arise. By being more proactive in their planning processes, departments can make significant process towards sustaining leadership continuity.

Leadership history

One of the reasons that the context of academic departments is so difficult to change is the longevity of the faculty members. The tenure system can lead to relative stability in departments, with faculty members remaining in a department for many years. Institutional memory and culture become ingrained and can lead to resistance to change (Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005; Tierney, 1988). The past can take on an importance that may be rare in other organizational environments: "This is how we have always done it, so this is how we must always do it." Mark's resistance to an external chair, due to the tightly held memory of a difficult time in the department's history when they hired a chair from another campus, is a perfect example. These past experiences shape how faculty memories think about the future. Mark continues to resist an external hire, despite the push from younger faculty who are not swayed by memories of that difficult time in the department.

It is important for institutions to recognize a department's history while also embracing it and understanding the impact it has on the future. At the same time, history should not be allowed to handcuff future progress or change. Departments need to be open to change, to trying something new that might be linked more tightly with the current culture instead of past history. For instance, Jack's experience is an example of the need to question whether you continue to do one thing when departmental culture may dictate other paths. When the search for a department leader was launched, the faculty voted to hire a department head – someone who would be selected by the dean – seemingly because they had always had a department head. When, however, the dean selected someone who was not the choice of the faculty, the faculty members in the department were clearly upset. They set about to run Jack out of office, especially when he started exerting the power that is sometimes extended to heads and not chairs. The fact that there was not a lengthy discussion about what the faculty members wanted from their department head led to a difficult, intense, and unstable time for the department. While departments and institutions cannot change history, they can be encouraged to recognize the need to sometimes move into new directions and to break ties with the past when the future dictates a new course. Deans and department leaders need to think about and examine the role of strategic planning, annual reviews, and post-tenure review processes can play in determining incentives for change.

Faculty perception of the chair's role

The faculty perception of the role of chair is also linked to the department's leadership history. What is expected of a current chair often shapes the ways that a former chair approached the role. These types of precedents can make it very hard to change how faculty members view the role and what they want from the chair. For example, Maria worried about very high expectations after following a long-time department chair who seemingly did everything himself. She made a concerted effort to change the faculty's perception of what the chair's role should be. Although she faced resistance from some who thought she was trying to shirk her responsibilities, she was able to have frank conversations with faculty about how she envisioned the role and how it would help the department to have others empowered to take on leadership roles.

Although it can be difficult and tedious to change how faculty members view the chair's role and responsibilities, one approach is to be explicit about those expectations. By encouraging ongoing and open discourse, faculty and chairs can have a clearer understanding of how expectations may be similar and how they may differ. This can lead to more open discussions about the future of the department and explicit discussions around leadership issues. Such conversations not only enhance the current leadership of the department by bringing faculty and the chair onto the same page, they also facilitate discussions about leadership continuity to happen more readily and not merely in response to a looming leadership change. The idea that simply initiating a conversation about leadership development and succession can have an impact on the department was reinforced throughout this study. As department chairs were asked to think about these issues in response to interview questions, it became clear that, by talking about leadership development now, it forced them to think about the issue and how it impacted their own department, and in some cases, gave them ideas for how and when to begin these conversations with their faculty colleagues.

In addition to encouraging ongoing conversations about department leadership, institutions should develop formal position descriptions for department heads and chairs, something that is surprisingly often lacking (Gmelch, 2002a). By having a formal understanding of what the role entails, it allows chairs to gain greater clarity about what is expected of them. It also clarifies for the faculty what the chair will be doing and what the chair won't be doing. In some departments, it was clear that, in the chair's mind, the faculty had an unrealistic expectation for what the chair would do and what authority they could wield. Such position descriptions would also need the approval of the dean, who may have his/her own expectation of what the chair should be doing. A formalization of the chair's roles and responsibilities can clear up ambiguity for the leader, the faculty and the dean. The chairs interviewed in this study perceive that the faculty members see the chair's role as extensive and overwhelming. The faculty members appear to think that the chair has a laundry list of responsibilities, some of which may be accurate, but not all. Having explicit discussions about the expectations and formalizing position descriptions may also lead to enhanced leadership continuity by demonstrating to the faculty that the role may not be as overwhelming as it seems.

Longevity of service by the chair has the potential to impact leadership continuity efforts. Balancing leadership stability and change is one of the significant challenges associated with cultivating leadership continuity. How long a chair should serve is dependent on a number of variables – how effective they are, their tendency towards burnout, the environment within the department, etc. – making it difficult to prescribe an appropriate term limit for department leaders. Department chairs, however, should be cognizant of the impact that long tenures can have on the perception that faculty members have regarding the role of chair. Potential department leaders may be intimidated by a chair who has served for ten or more years and has been very effective in that position, a situation that Pam, the longest-serving chair, feared in her department. Faculty members may perceive the role as one that should be held long-time, possibly dissuading some of them from considering serving as chair due to a resistance to make such a long-term commitment.

At first glance, a recommendation for enacting term limits for department leaders, such as recommended by Michael, could be seen as a way to prevent burnout of chairs and heads while also forcing departments to plan ahead for leadership transitions. In addition, term limits could reinforce an expectation of turnover in the role and prevent faculty from seeing it as a long-term position that would take them away from their faculty activities too long. However, as the findings from this study demonstrate, there are too many factors that impact leadership continuity, thereby making it difficult to recommend a term limit for department leaders. For instance, Maria voiced her concerns about whether the department would have somebody who was ready to step in at the end of her second term. Although she is adamant that she would only serve two terms, she also recognizes that there might not be sufficient leadership capacity in the department so that she could step down knowing that the department would be in good hands. Departments should be encouraged to plan ahead for leadership transitions and to think about what will be most effective for the department while recognizing the drawbacks of long-term chairs, both on faculty perception of the role and the stress and potential burnout for the individual chair.

Process

This study reveals a department leadership cycle that is consistent across the different departments, although departments may vary in how they approach individual stages of the cycle. The leadership cycle is the process through which leaders are recruited, selected and transitioned into a role in which they are then engaged, even through the point in time that requires them to prepare for new leadership and, ultimately, another transition. Each stage presents a new challenge for both the department and the individual chair and, with the exception of the leadership routinization stage, action is expected at each stage of the cycle. It is also critical to understand the impact that each stage can have on the future. For example, a department leader like Charlotte, who experienced a very difficult transition to the role, may be influenced by her own experience and take steps to ensure that future transitions occur more fluidly and transparently. Faculty members and academic leaders at all levels should be cognizant of this potential impact and proactively work to create situations where that impact is beneficial to all involved and the leadership cycle can be developed into one that is consistently positive. One way to achieve this is to more formally recognize this leadership cycle and put mechanisms in place that will facilitate smoother transitions from one leadership stage to the next. There are specific policies and practices that institutions and departments can enact in order to positively influence the departmental leadership cycle and the following sections provide recommendations that can be implemented during each stage of the leadership cycle.

This study explores the importance of the search process and the impact it has on the incoming chair and the department. The search process allows both the department and the individual to gain a clearer understanding of each other's expectations through the submission of written application materials and during conversations between the candidates and the faculty members in the department. Because of the opportunities that the search process offers for open conversations about the future of the department, it is beneficial to the institution, the department, and the individual to mandate that a formal search process always take place. In times of crisis, there can be a natural tendency to place someone in the leadership role as quickly as possible, as was demonstrated in many of the individual cases presented in this study. Yet, it is during difficult times that dialogue and conversation take on even greater importance. To shortcut the search process for expediency's sake can be detrimental to all involved parties.

The next stage – transition – provides the opportunity for socialization of both the chair and the department. Just as new faculty members become socialized to their new department (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993), new chairs must also become socialized to their new position and to the department, given their new perspective (Thomas & Schuh, 2004). Tierney and Rhoads (1993) describe the organizational socialization as "a culture process that involves the exchange of patterns of thought and action" (p. 21). For new department chairs, it is important to learn the nuances of why a department operates the way that it does so they can understand the context within which decisions have been made in the past. The transition stage is the time when this exchange of knowledge, context and understanding occurs, and it is important that departments and chairs recognize that this transitional time is crucial.

The search for a new department leader officially starts when the current chair or head announces their intention to step down. The timing of such an announcement has a great impact on the ability of the department to search for the next leader but it also impacts how smoothly the transition stage can move forward. When Maria's predecessor announced his pending resignation, he purposefully did it a year early so that the department would have time to conduct a search and he would have time to spend with his successor, teaching Maria about the department chair's responsibilities. The intentionality behind his decision demonstrates recognition of the difficulty of the chair's role and an acknowledgment that spending time with the incoming chair is beneficial and can ease the transition. Several chairs, in contrast to this deliberate approach, experienced abrupt and difficult transitions, with little or no help from their predecessor. Several of the chairs who participated in the study also expressed the desire to have overlap with their successor. In order to make such transitions possible, chairs should be encouraged to announce their resignation at least six months, but preferably one year, prior to stepping down. This allows departments enough time to conduct a search and to provide sufficient time for the incoming and outgoing chairs to have time to work together.

While these policy recommendations are intended to make the transition for incoming chairs smoother, it is important to recognize that it is not always possible to plan so far in advance. As was evident throughout this study, chairs sometimes quit unexpectedly or are forced out. Departments must remain flexible and should move quickly to fill any leadership vacancy if it occurs without much advance notice. However, as departments encourage leadership continuity efforts, the development of a leadership corps in the department will ease any disruption by having people who have a greater understanding of the role of chair and have served as leaders in the department who can step in to fill the void.

Leadership routinization can be a time of relative calm and stability in a department. While activity, crisis or change may be occurring elsewhere in the department or institution, it is during this stage that the head or chair has acclimated to their role and the faculty, although they may not agree with all decisions or actions, have acclimated to the department leader. While chairs now have a greater understanding of their role and have developed routines for accomplishing what they need to accomplish, their task is often still difficult, rife with conflict and tension. They are often trying to juggle many commitments, both personal and professional while also balancing their administrative and academic identities (Gmelch, 2002a; Thomas & Schuh, 2004; Whitson & Hubert, 1982; Wolverton et al., 1999) and it is important to recognize that just because they are more experienced with and better understand the chair's role, does not mean that the job is any easier.

Often it is during this third stage that a chair may begin to think about future leadership, although not necessarily take any action. Without announcing an intention (or even being fully committed to stepping down at a particular point in the future) to step down, the chairs in this study indicate that any cultivation department leaders may do at this stage is often less formal. Placing faculty members in leadership roles, perhaps as chair of search or ad hoc committees in the department, is one way that they seek to gauge the leadership capacity in the department. Bringing colleagues into the decision-making process is another way of informally cultivating potential leaders, while also gauging what their leadership style may be.

Once it is clear that the chair is planning to step down at a given point in the future – during the anticipation of change stage – the use of leadership roles tends to become more formal and overt; it appears that the earlier potential leaders are more formally cultivated, the smoother the subsequent transition tends to be. This is when chairs can provide various and explicit opportunities for faculty members to take leadership roles in the department. Charlie provides an example of this by explaining how he creates opportunities for faculty in the department to stand up in faculty meetings and lead discussions. The benefits of this strategy are two-fold, helping both the individual faculty member and the department as a whole. This experience provides the faculty member with exposure to a leadership role, albeit limited, while also offering the department the chance to see the particular faculty member in a public leadership role.

In some departments, this is also a time when it is appropriate to look at the role of associate chair or head with a more discerning eye towards the future. Departments should, as a policy and practice, utilize the associate role as a training ground for future chairs and heads. By having current chairs working closely with associate chairs, involving them in the decision-making process and having them take a visible role in departmental operations, it allows the associate department leader to gain a clearer understanding of the chair's roles and responsibilities. An associate chair can also represent the department, in the chair's absence, at college and institutional level meetings, thereby expanding his/her understanding about the department's position within the larger organizations. For departments whose structure does not include an associate chair or head, consideration should be given to developing a temporary position that could serve as a form of apprenticeship for a potential department leader.

The final stage of the leadership cycle is the preparation for the transfer of the position from the outgoing chair to the incoming chair. There are key policies and practices that institutions and departments can follow in order to make this transition as smooth as possible for all involved, including the faculty in the department. The role of administrative support staff as resources for the new chair should not be overlooked. These staff members can provide institutional and departmental memory, which helps a new chair to understand the context within which decisions have been made in the past. Staff members also provide the operational support to the new chair, explaining the mechanics of the budget or personnel processes, for example. They often have a clear understanding of the critical policies that chairs need to be aware of and can be a tremendous resource for new chairs, as evidenced by several of the chairs in this study. Staff should be actively and explicitly brought into the transition process.

On a larger scale, institutions should provide clearer guidelines to departments regarding the preparation and maintenance of departmental files. A first step to this process might be for institutions to initiate campus-wide – or even school and college based – discussions on best practices for department chair record keeping. From such conversations, guidelines could then be developed that would provide a framework within which chairs could prepare and maintain files. The goal should be to create policies that increase the probability of a smooth transition from one chair to the next. The creation of such policies might then prevent what happened to Charlotte, whose predecessor shredded documents prior to her becoming the department leader. Chairs benefit from having access to these files, which provide them with a historical record for past activities but can also serve as templates for future work, e.g. what a chair's recommendation letter for a faculty member's tenure case should look like. Such practical policies can have a huge impact on how smoothly a transition of leadership can happen.

Person

As this study demonstrates, the individual chair is a crucial player in any successful leadership continuity effort. S/he is the only person in the department who has the benefit of a full understanding of the chair's role and what it means for the department at that moment in time. In addition, s/he enjoys a more holistic perspective of the discipline, department, college and institution and how the different cultures and expectations intersect. This unique understanding is the chair's alone and, as such, gives him/her a distinct role to play in cultivating potential leaders. This role is one that chairs in this study clearly embrace, as they think strategically about the skills and temperament of their faculty and place faculty members in key roles to gauge their leadership abilities.

One of the key contributions of this study is the identification of the latent role that chairs play in this process. A significant portion of prior research on chairs has focused on the manifest roles that chairs play: conflict mediator, cheerleader, staff supervisor, mentor, to name just a few (Aziz et al., 2005; Diamond, 1996; Seagren et al., 1993; Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, & Beach, 2006; Wilson, 2001; Wolverton, Gmelch & Sorenson, 1998). These are roles that are codified and recognized, both in practice and in prior research, and the chair is expected to perform them. But the role that chairs can play in the identification and cultivation of future leaders is critical to leadership continuity efforts. Given their unmatched understanding of the demands of the chair's responsibilities and roles, it is chairs that are in the best position to help the department to recognize its fullest leadership potential. By making these roles more formal, institutions are explicitly empowering the chairs to proactively think about the department's future leadership. It is easier for the institution to then support the chair's activities in this area because it is an explicit and expected role for the chair.

Institutional Support

This study makes numerous specific recommendations for ways that institutions and departments can enhance leadership continuity efforts. While implementing these policy and practice recommendations will help departments, institutions of higher education need to provide greater support to departments through the development of training programs for both incoming heads and chairs and emerging leaders. While spending time with outgoing chairs is a way for incoming chairs to learn the departmental context, chairs must also operate within the institution's policies, culture, and context.

Campus-wide programs can provide that framework of understanding, especially around issues that all chairs must contend with such as budget, personnel, and faculty development strategies. Many of the chairs who participated in this study were part of a campus-wide pilot program at SMU that featured monthly sessions on a variety of topics facing chairs. While the chairs benefited from gaining a better understanding of campus policies, they also enjoyed the opportunity to meet chairs and heads from outside of their individual schools and colleges. They developed a sense of community outside of their own college, which served to both build a support system but also offered ideas and strategies that they might not have exposure to within their own college. Such institutionally-based programs are few and far between (Gmelch, 2002a, 2002b) but have the potential to have a huge impact.

Another area that institutions might explore is the development of training programs for emerging leaders. While department chairs have been creating informal programs by placing faculty in leadership roles, institutions could formalize the process through the creation of programs that give faculty the opportunity to explore leadership opportunities prior to accepting them. This would give the faculty insight and practical experience into what it means to be a department leader and time to explore whether or not it is the right move for them. As discussed in the review of literature, Wolverton, Ackerman and Holt (2005) provide an interesting example of the impact of such a program, in which some of the participating faculty realized that a leadership position was not the right role for them but others had their resolve strengthened and confidence lifted. One of the difficulties of creating such a program is determining who to invite to participate. In some cases, a faculty member might self-select, but their peers might not agree that they have the skills or temperament to handle the associated power and authority. In other cases, it might not be obvious that a faculty member has any interest in an administrative role, even though they have the skills. Therefore, it is important, when developing such programs, to seek input from all constituencies and to create a process for selection to the program that can mitigate any difficulties in finding the right people.

Another way that institutions can provide support to chairs is funding their participation in national conferences and workshops, both those that discipline based and those with a more general focus on issues germane to academic leadership. Like the institutionally-based programs, national workshops and conferences offer chairs a broader perspective of their role as well as allowing them the opportunity to see how their disciplinary peers are handling challenging situations.

Whether training programs are institutionally based or developed by national organizations, they serve to enhance leadership continuity by helping to build stronger department leaders. In doing so, a corps of current leaders can be developed who are in tune with the nuances of the role and understand what it means to be a leader. By building this contingent of strong leaders, more emphasis can be focused on the importance of cultivating future leaders. Department chairs who understand the critical nature of the role are more likely to approach leadership continuity efforts deliberately and strategically, empowering the department to develop or enhance their leadership capacity. Ultimately, this helps to build stronger departments and stronger institutions.

Next steps: Future research

As noted in the review of literature, prior research on department leaders has been limited to the role conflict and ambiguity that chairs often experience and ongoing efforts to quantify the many tasks and responsibilities of department leaders. This study, despite being limited to one research institution, sheds light on the ongoing complexities facing current department chairs and provides insights into how departments can be strengthened through deliberate leadership continuity efforts. Additional research in this area is clearly warranted and several recommendations for future research are outlined below.

This study provides a foundation of knowledge about department leadership continuity efforts. In order to enhance the power of the findings, it is advisable to develop a survey that can then be used for broader studies to assess how transferable and generalizable these findings are to a wide range of departments in various types of institutions. For instance, while this multiple case study found no differences based on discipline, a study with a larger population may uncover disciplinary differences not apparent here. Another area for exploration, which could be addressed through an extensive survey, is the impact of department size – and its interaction with discipline – on the departmental context and leadership continuity efforts.

Another way to enhance and expand the body of literature is to conduct a longitudinal follow-up study that focuses on what actually happens in the transition when these chairs leave the position. Such a study would provide a wealth of empirical knowledge on the department leadership cycle and enhance understanding of department leadership transitions. A further recommendation is an in-depth follow-up study that explores the larger departmental context as the leadership continuity process evolves beyond the current chairs. By studying what happens in the department following the next leadership transition, a deeper understanding of leadership continuity could be developed. Such an understanding has the potential to provide critical insights and recommendations to institutions of higher education to strengthen leadership at the department level.

Lastly, additional research on the role of associate chair and the merits and disadvantages of using both formal and informal leadership roles to cultivate future chairs is warranted. While this case study supports the notion that these roles can provide crucial experience and exposure, closer examination of how the role of associate chair is used across departments and institutions might shed further light on ways to position the role to better support leadership continuity efforts.

Conclusion

This study advances the existing research on department leadership by deepening the understanding of the role that chairs play in cultivating potential leaders in the academic departments. While succession as defined in the traditional management literature – where the leader has a direct hand in selecting his/her successor – does not occur at the academic department level, this study has demonstrated that chairs do indeed play a critical role in leadership continuity efforts. This study has made direct recommendations for institutions and departments to implement as both policy and practice for leadership continuity, but its deeper contribution is in offering strategies for improving and enhancing department leadership. The power of leadership continuity extends beyond making leadership transition a smoother process to developing chairs that are more effective. By creating stronger and more capable leadership, institutions are building strong departments that benefit from enhanced and sustained leadership.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Nancy Buffone and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education program in the Department of Educational Policy, Research and Administration. My doctoral research focuses on academic department leadership, with a particular interest in the succession planning among department chairs. I invite you to participate in this research study, which will provide a deeper understanding of the succession planning process at the departmental level, from the perspective of current department chairs.

As a participant in this study, I ask that you agree to participate in a semi-structured, audio-taped interview.

The information gathered during this interview will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous, and will only be used for the purposes of this doctoral study. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and may be discontinued at any time without penalty or prejudice. By signing this consent form, you also have the right to review any of the information or materials gathered in this study, including the final research paper.

I have supplied two copies of this informed consent form, both of which must be signed if you agree to participate in the study. You may keep one copy of your records and the other is for my records. By signing below, you agree that you have read and understand all information provided to you in this form, that you are willingly participating in this research study, and that you are aware that you can withdraw from the study at any point.

If you have questions, please contact me at 413-XXX-XXXX (cell) or XXX-XXXX (home) or via email at nbuffone@gmail.com.

____ ____________
Signature Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I'd like to remind you that all responses will be kept anonymous and will only be used for the purpose of this study.

Background

1. To begin, I'd like to find out more about your department.
2. If you were talking to a candidate for a faculty position in the department, how would you describe the department?
3. How do the faculty work together?
4. What is the communication process in the department?
5. What is the decision making process in the department?
6. How are the staff, students and non-tenure system faculty involved in the department?

Current chair's transition to the role:

7. I'd like to next find out more about your own transition to the chair's position.
8. Prior to your becoming chair, did your department have any sort of succession plan in place? If so, what did that process look like? If not, why do you think?
9. Prior to being selected as the current chair, did your predecessor cultivate you for the position? In what ways?
10. Did you seek or were you offered opportunities, either in the department or in the institution, to take on leadership roles prior to becoming chair?

11. Why did you decide to take on the role of department chair? (Probe: Did you seek it? Were you recruited? What did you see as incentives/benefits of doing so? Drawbacks or challenges?)
12. In your case, what did the process of chair selection look like? (Probe for any role of colleagues/dean/provost in decision-making)
13. In retrospect, do you feel that you were prepared for the role of chair? In what ways? Where were gaps in preparation?
14. Describe your transition to the chair's position, once you were the chair-elect.

Role as chair

15. Once you became chair, were there any surprises? (Probe: Pleasant surprises? Frustrating surprises?
16. What were key challenges you faced in the first month as chair? The first year?
17. How do you see your role and responsibilities as chair?

Succession planning

18. Now I would like to switch gears and ask about succession planning in the department.
19. Does your department have a history of selecting department chairs internally or externally? Why?
20. Have you thought about when you will step down from the chair's role?
21. Probe: How much have you thought the succession process and what ideas do you have about that?
22. Probe: Have you discussed the issue of your succession with the dean (or provost)?

23. Has your department actively discussed the issue of your succession?
24. What leadership development opportunities are there in your department for faculty? Examples?
25. Are potential successors being cultivated? If so, how? If not, why not?
26. Did your school/college provide opportunities for training? If so, can you describe them?
27. What was beneficial and what was not?
28. Does your department, in general, value this kind of planning? Why or why not?
29. If you could design your own succession plan, what would it look like?
30. What obstacles do you see in making that dream a reality?
31. What would happen in your department if you stepped down as chair tomorrow?
32. What are your plans for when you do step down as chair?

Closing questions

33. Do you see benefits to succession planning for department chairs? If so, describe.
34. Do you see obstacles, drawbacks, or challenges in terms of planning for chair succession?
35. In terms of department chair succession planning, how will you/your department gauge success?
36. Is there anything else you would like to add, that we haven't already addressed?

Thank you very much for being so generous with your time.

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