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University Leadership in the Time COVID-19 and the Reckoning of Systemic Inequity in Higher Education

By

ALISON MARY SANDERS

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

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University Leadership in the Time of Covid-19 and the Reckoning of Systemic Inequity in

Higher Education

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted higher education in ways that were previously unfathomable

and has brought to light the systemic racism and inequity that is pervasive in American society

and the educational system. As the world entered its' third year of the COVID-19 pandemic,

long-existing systemic racism and inequity in institutions of higher education remained

prominent. At the center of these challenges is leadership—operating at the individual level and

as a dynamic institutional process responding to constantly shifting pressures. The purpose of

this study was to describe and understand the experiences of university leaders during the

COVID-19 pandemic in the context of systemic racism and inequity in higher education in a

large public research-intensive institution. Using a qualitative approach, this study specifically

investigated the decision-making processes of leadership, how institutional culture and structure

facilitated or hindered those decisions, and whether and how university leaders prioritized

addressing systemic inequity as the COVID-19 crisis unfolded. Semi-structured interviews were

conducted with ten university leaders along with a review of additional qualitative documents

related to the participants' leadership. Five themes emerged: culture of care; authentic

leadership; communication and engagement; innovation, collaboration, and adaptation; and

centering equity. This study contributes to an extensive body of research on higher education

leadership and leadership during crises, while providing an additional perspective on shared

leadership and shared equity leadership in preparing leaders to face long standing challenges in

higher education.

DEDICATION

To my parents, for their unconditional love. To my family and my friends, for their love,

laughter and support.

To my grandmother, Mary Sanders and my grandfather Max Campbell, who no doubt

would have followed a path to higher education had they been provided the opportunity.

To my mentors and my colleagues, for showing me what leadership can be.

To my cohort- Cohort 15, life-long friends who transformed me on this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

counselors, and bright lights when I was dispirited and discouraged—I only hope that I was able to do the same for them.

Finally, I've saved the best for last: Tom Parker, my husband, life partner, in-house editor, you read and learned more than you ever wanted to know about higher education research and leadership! I am grateful for you every single day and I love you more than I could ever express.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

The confluence of the "twin pandemics" of COVID-19 and the reckoning of long-standing systemic racism and inequity is testing institutions of higher education, requiring adaptive, agile, and compassionate responses (J. Cole et al., 2021). Those who occupy leadership positions in higher education always operate in a complex and dynamic environment (Birnbaum, 1988). However, the challenges facing institutions today require new thinking, actions, and processes that move beyond traditional, hierarchical leadership models.

On March 11, 2020, the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, declared that SARS Co-V-2 had reached the stage of a pandemic, highlighting that it was "not just a public health crisis, it [was] a crisis that will touch every sector – so every sector and every individual must be involved in the fight" (WHO, 2020, paragraph 2). Colleges, universities, and schools shifted to remote instruction almost overnight in the same month, and over two years later, the impact of the pandemic on all aspects of life continues to reverberate across the globe (Sachs et al., 2021).

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic converged with the reckoning of longstanding systemic, racial, economic, and public health inequities. In the United States, there was unrest and protests in response to the murders of Black Americans at the hands of White police officers and anti-Asian and anti-immigrant rhetoric against the backdrop of a contentious political climate glorifying White supremacy (J. Cole et al., 2021). Facing theses crises in a toxic national climate required exceptional leadership centered on empathy, compassion, teamwork, and adaptability, as well as a willingness to put equity at the forefront of critical decisions (Delene, 2021; Thompson & Miller, 2018). The continued confluence of these crises continues to

test the ability of institutions to survive in both the short-term and the long-term, and a new perspective on leadership, both at the individual and institutional level, may determine the outcome.

A New Kind of Disruption

Despite a history of being "crisis prone" (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005; Rall, 2021) and in a constant state of disruption (Bellack, 2015; Birnbaum, 1988; Booker Jr., 2014; Jacobsen, 2010; Thompson & Miller, 2018), institutions of higher education had no roadmap for dealing with a wide-ranging and destructive global health pandemic such as COVID-19. Institutions were also not prepared for the outcry and social unrest over police killings of Black Americans, which had been brewing far longer than COVID-19 (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Hailu & Sarubbi, 2019). Little could have prepared higher education institutions for the convergence of these crises, and responses varied widely (J. Cole et al., 2021; Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Dumulescu & Muţiu, 2021; Sachs et al., 2021; Stephens et al., 2020). The long-term impact to colleges and universities remains unknown, yet this moment presents opportunities for leaders to address systemic racism and inequity in higher education (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Kezar et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017) and effect impactful and far-reaching changes through an equity-focused leadership praxis (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015).

Institutional Context

The context of institutional culture is essential to understanding the dynamics of leadership during the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and the reckoning of systemic racism and inequity. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) developed the concept of six normative cultures of the academy that provide a foundation for further inquiry into organizational dynamics (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Latta, 2020; Manning, 2018). They described culture as "a container. It establishes

roles, rules, attitudes, behaviors, and practices. It describes ways for people to be safe"

(Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008, p. 12). Institutional culture and structure are key elements in the

dynamic interaction between leadership, a campus community, and the complexities of higher

education.

Organizational responses to disruptions depend on several factors, including

organizational culture, structure, resources, and leadership. Institutions of higher education

responded to COVID-19 in a variety of ways (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; Dumulescu &

Muțiu, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Fox et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2020; Robbins, 2020).

While adapting to local circumstances, drawing on organizational strengths and resources, and

relying on their institutional leadership to frame a response to the COVID-19 pandemic,

institutions continue to face issues of racial inequity and its impact on already marginalized

communities.

The Centrality of Leadership

Leadership competency, although always needed, is essential during a time of crisis. If

leaders are not born but made (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Koehn, 2020) with many "forged in crisis"

(Koehn, 2020, p.2), then learning to practice key behaviors that inspire constituents to prevail

through difficult times is essential. This means acknowledging the difficulty of a situation and

people's fears, while simultaneously encouraging resilience, providing a sense of purpose and

participation, and emphasizing learning and experimentation, as well as tending to their own

physical and emotional well-being (Bensimon, 1989; Koehn, 2020). Leadership may be the most

critical element in setting the direction and priorities of a university's response to challenges

(Burner, 2016; DeCosmo, 2019; Dumulescu & Muțiu, 2021; Fortunato et al., 2018; Jacobsen,

2010; Kelley, 2014; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). The stakes are high, and a poor leadership response,

whether real or perceived, can result in reputational damage (Coombs, 2007; DeCosmo, 2019), decreased enrollments (Copley & Douthett, 2020; Kline, 2019), donor retreat, financial losses, and an overall loss of public confidence in an institution. The tone at the top matters, whether referring to individual leaders, leadership teams, or leadership as a process (Holcombe et al., 2021; Northouse, 2022). The key elements of how leadership functions effectively in a crisis outlined by Boin et al. (2016) include explaining what happened, offering guidance, instilling hope, showing empathy, and affirming that the institution is in control of the situation.

Much of the research on leadership in higher education has focused on the attributes of individual leaders rather than on leadership as a process within organizational culture and structure (Hunt & Fedynich, 2019). Ongoing crises provide an opportunity to evaluate the leadership styles that are responsive to the complexities of higher education (Bolman & Deal, 2015; LeBlanc, 2018). Dynamic challenges, such as systemic racial inequity and COVID-19, may be less responsive to command-and-control structures (Janssen & van der Voort, 2020) and require learning, creativity, and adaptive capacity (Afzaal, 2021; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). A shared and distributed leadership approach (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017) supports organizational agility, informed decision-making, adaptability, and resilience (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; DeRue, 2011; Janssen & van der Voort, 2020; LeBlanc, 2018; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Framing leadership as a complex and interactive relationship between leaders and "organizational and situational factors" (Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009), while also framing what leaders think and how they behave within the culture of an organization, is key to understanding leadership in higher education (Bensimon, 1989; Bolman & Deal, 2017; Northouse, 2022; Vuori, 2018).

Leadership, Disruption and Change

Although considerable research has focused on leadership in higher education, most of those studies were conducted outside of the context of structural racism and inequity and the immediate and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (J. Cole et al., 2021; Dumulescu & Muţiu, 2021). A body of work exists examining relatively short-term crisis responses in higher education, including responses to natural disasters (Goswick et al., 2018), racial and societal unrest (Fortunato et al., 2017, 2018; Lucas Jr. et al., 2015; Yasin et al., 2019), and campus tragedies (Jacobsen, 2010; Mills, 2004; Treadwell et al., 2019). Similarly, much research has been conducted on leadership in higher education (Amey, 2006; Bensimon, 1989, 1990; Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005; Bolman & Deal, 2017; Hannum et al., 2015; Kezar, 2012). However, the inquiries have focused on the attributes of individual leaders, such as presidents or chancellors, or the experiences of individual academic leaders (Bensimon, 1989; Cohen & March, 1974; Dumulescu & Muţiu, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Latta, 2020; Vuori, 2018). Given the scale and complexity of the current disruptions to higher education created by the combination of COVID-19 and the reckoning of systemic racial inequity (J. Cole et al., 2021), hierarchical and more traditionally oriented leaders may struggle with effectiveness in contrast to teams of leaders that operated from a principle of shared or adaptive leadership (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Northouse, 2022). These disruptions also provided an opportunity to examine the concept of leadership as an element of a complex ecosystem (J. Cole et al., 2021; Kezar et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009) and suggest a model of an adaptive university; one that develops a culture of flexibility, leveraging unpredictability into opportunity.

Despite the fact that universities tend to be deeply hierarchical, a "command and control" governance system tends to be less effective in complex systems (Hunt & Fedynich, 2019; Janssen & van der Voort, 2020; Kezar, 2008; Sewerin & Holmberg, 2017; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010), and more recent models of leadership have advanced principles of adaptive, authentic, or shared leadership as more relevant and responsive to the challenges faced in higher education, such as the current crises (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Kezar et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Sewerin & Holmberg, 2017; Thompson & Miller, 2018).

COVID-19 has created a disruptive and unforeseen challenge, and the rare opportunity for a "reset" in higher education, as described by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2020), through which leaders can also take the reins and tackle issues of systemic racism and inequity head on. At the center of this challenge is leadership. This study sought to understand whether this shift started to happen in the shadow of a global pandemic.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership and organizational factors that contributed to a university's response to COVID-19 in the context of systemic racism and inequity in higher education and to discover how university leaders understood, reflected upon, and developed their own leadership praxis as they navigated the university's response to the twin pandemics.

Research Questions

The approach of university leadership in response to the disruption caused by the twin pandemics was examined by asking the following research questions:

    a. How did leaders navigate their leadership praxis as the COVID-19 crisis and reckoning of systemic racism and inequity unfolded?

b. To what extent did the organizational structures and culture of the institution influence their leadership response?

c. How and to what extent did university leadership prioritize addressing systemic inequity in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Organization of My Study

This study is organized into six chapters. After setting the context for the study in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the four conceptual frameworks that guided this inquiry: the six cultures of the academy, Bolman and Deal's four frames of leadership, complexity leadership theory, and shared leadership and shared equity leadership. Chapter 3 then provides an overview of the extensive literature discussing leadership, crisis leadership, and the current context of higher education. Chapter 4 describes the study methodology, and Chapter 5 describes the themes and findings of the study. Chapter 6 concludes the study with a discussion, implications for policy and practice, and possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The study's research questions were posed through frameworks accounting for the

individual and institutional scale of the university. Bolman and Deal's (1991, 2017) four frames

of leadership informed the inquiry into leadership perspectives and actions. Bergquist and

Pawlak's (2008) concept of the six cultures of the academy provided the framework for

examining institutional structure and culture. Complexity leadership theory, first posited by Uhl-

Bien and Marion (2009) and the concepts of shared leadership and shared equity leadership

(Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017) structured the inquiry into

the leadership and organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic inequity in

higher education (J. Cole et al., 2021). These latter frameworks were also used to examine how

leaders navigated their own leadership in response to the crises that unfolded.

Bolman and Deal's Four Frames of Leadership

Rooted in the extensive body of research in organizational theory and behavior, Bolman

and Deal's (2017) four frames of leadership explains the different perspectives leaders adopt

when faced with complex organizational issues. When developing their leadership model,

Bolman and Deal (2017) drew from sociology, anthropology, psychology, and political science.

They based their framework on three assumptions: leaders are made, not born; organizations

thrive under good leadership; and good leadership is independent of hierarchy or position within

the organization.

The premise of Bolman and Deal's (2017) model is that leaders approach organizational

challenges through four perspectives, or "frames" (also referred to as "windows," "perspectives,"

"orientations," and "lenses"), and refer to "reframing" as "the ability to think about situations

from more than one angle, which lets you develop alternate diagnoses and strategies" (p. 6). Frames direct how leaders think and respond, and influence from which aspects of organizational culture they draw. Adopting a multi-frame perspective, or reframing, means addressing complex issues with an objective lens, emphasizing clarity, patience, and adaptivity (Bensimon, 1989; Bolman & Deal, 2015; Vuori, 2018) to the challenges facing an institution.

The four frames of leadership are structural, human resource, political, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The structural frame identifies the organization as hierarchical, with defined policies, procedures, and well-established rules and governance. The central tenets of the structural frame include prioritization, rules, roles and responsibilities, technology, external factors, and a defined decision-making process. In this frame, leadership is focused on planning, efficiency, decision-making, hierarchy, and control.

The human resource frame is rooted in the concept that human and organizational needs must be aligned to be effective. In this frame, professional development and support are emphasized. Change occurs through collective action and shared leadership by which staff are encouraged to engage in decision-making (Vuori, 2011). Leadership is focused on team-oriented consensus building, problem-solving, building relationships, commitment, and loyalty.

In the political frame, organizations are composed of competing stakeholders constantly jostling for power and control over the allocation of scarce resources (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Leaders tend to focus on building ever-changing coalitions to advance their agenda through bargaining, negotiation, and influence. Power, control, conflict, and institutional politics are at the forefront.

The symbolic frame describes the organization as a body with shared values and orientations through which stakeholders bond over institutional norms (innovation,

collaboration), rituals (convocation), ceremonies (commencement), and traditions. Leadership in this space functions as the catalyst to build an institutional culture with shared values and philosophies, such as values expressed in a university's strategic plan. The elements within this frame are stories, legends, and hero(ine)s that are central to leadership guiding the organization toward a common vision.

The four frames of leadership provided a framework to examine and interpret the decision-making approaches and perspectives of individual leaders in this study. In particular, the concept of multi-framing, or the ability to incorporate more than one frame simultaneously (Bensimon, 1989; Bolman & Deal, 1991, 2017), was essential to inquiring how leaders understood and navigated their own leadership as they responded to the twin crises.

The Cultures of the Academy

Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) posited that organizational cultures "provide a framework for creating order out of the complex and often baffling dynamics of organizational life" (p. 8) and that higher education institutions in particular "are in the business of conveying and providing meaning not only to their students but also to their faculty and administrators — and ultimately to society as a whole" (p. 10). In order to better understand the culture of academic institutions and the complexity therein, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) identified six prominent cultures in academic institutions: collegial, managerial, developmental, advocacy, virtual, and tangible. These cultures are not monolithic, and the authors emphasized that although faculty and staff may identify strongly with one of the cultures, the other five are continuously interacting within an institution's dominant paradigm (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). This interactive model is similar to the multi-frame approach to effective leadership (Bensimon, 1989) in which the four

leadership frames advanced by Bolman and Deal (2017) dynamically interact and contribute to an overarching leadership praxis (see Figure 1) (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Bolman & Gallos, 2010).

Figure 1

Four Frames of Leadership by Bolman and Deal (2017) Overlaid with the Six Cultures of the Academy by Bergquist and Pawlak (2008)

Managerial Bureaucratic

Developmental Virtual

Structural

Human Resource

Advocacy Collegial

Political

Symbolic

Tangible Collegial
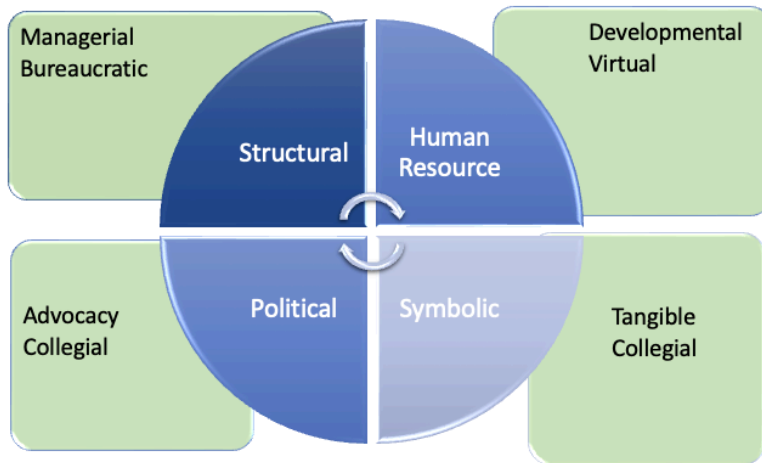
The collegial culture of the academy is most prevalent and influential in U.S. colleges and universities. This academic culture "finds meaning primarily in the disciplines represented by the faculty in the institution"; it values rationality, shared governance, and sees the primary mission of the institution to be the "generation, interpretation and dissemination of knowledge" (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008, p. 15). Leadership often emerges through informal, non-hierarchical, long-term relationships that develop in deliberative processes in committees. The managerial culture offers a counterbalance to the collegial culture, whose perceived shortcomings are ambiguity and lack of accountability and structure. Managerial and collegial cultures stand together as pillars in U.S. higher education.

The developmental culture emphasizes the promotion of organizational well-being through strategic investments in the personal and professional growth of all members of the

university community. The emergence of the advocacy culture affords faculty the opportunity to regain their voice in response to a perceived leaning towards the more administrative and bureaucratic managerial culture in institutions of higher education. This culture has emerged on campuses as a socio-political process to effect change (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008).

The virtual culture finds meaning in the dissemination of knowledge and ideas through platforms that support an open, global, and responsive educational network, leveraging the disruption, fragmentation, and ambiguity of the post-modern world (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Latta, 2020). This culture can be exemplified by the advent of massive open online courses (MOOCS), online learning, the use of social media, educational technology, and access to "big data" for research. In the context of COVID-19 and the current disruptions in higher education, the virtual culture became more visible.

The tangible culture is one of the foundational cultures of higher education, and its values and principles govern the majority of U.S. institutions. Similar to the symbolic leadership frame developed by Bolman and Deal (2017) and the cultural model discussed by Manning (2018), tangible culture reflects the desire to preserve institutional traditions and perceives itself as universal and unchanging. This cultural framework reflects a nostalgic desire to preserve the roots of higher education as an in-person experience in a physical location.

Complexity Leadership Theory

Complexity leadership theory addresses how organizations respond to uncertainty and takes into account the complexity of the organization and its people, culture, and history in facing challenges such as COVID-19 and systemic inequity (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Complexity leadership theory focuses on dynamic and emergent conditions within complex systems, such as institutions of higher education, suggesting that optimal leadership operates in a

contextual and interactive manner (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). It also

emphasizes the role of relationships while maintaining the key role of leaders, especially within

bureaucratic hierarchies (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). According to this theory, adaptive and

shared leadership are essential to institutional effectiveness and contribute to a culture of

innovation and collaboration in response to rapidly changing external conditions as illustrated in

Figure 2 (Bolman & Deal, 2015; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018).

Figure 2

Leadership Complexity Theory

Organization as a Complex Adaptive System
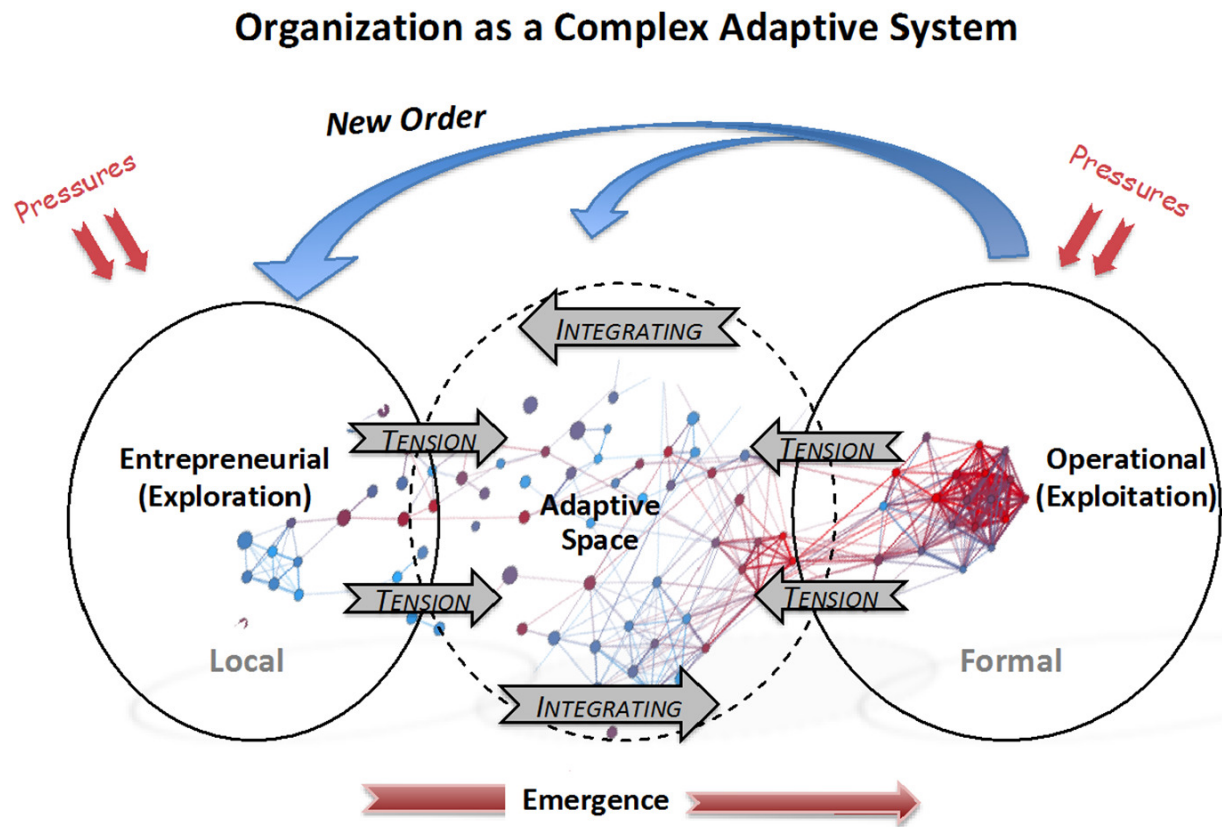
Note. Reprinted with permission from "Leadership for organizational adaptability: A theoretical

synthesis and integrative framework" by M. Uhl-Bien and M. Arena, 2018, *The Leadership

Quarterly, 29*(1), p. 98. Copyright 2018 by Elsevier.

Shared Leadership and Shared Equity Leadership

Shared leadership has been defined in various disciplines and is referred to as distributed, collective, or collaborative leadership (Bolden et al., 2009; Sewerin & Holmberg, 2017; Spillane et al., 2004). This model is based on the concept that collaborative leadership practices distributed throughout an organization are more responsive to the challenges and complexities of knowledge-based environments (Azorín et al., 2020; Holcombe et al., 2021; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017a). This framework challenges the "leader/follower binary" (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017, p. 3), presenting leadership as a process that is distributed across an institution (Bolden et al., 2009) rather than focusing on the attributes, traits, and capabilities of an individual leader.

Complex challenges facing colleges and universities, such as the dual crises of COVID-19 and systemic racism and inequity, may be more responsive to a shared leadership approach that focuses on evidence-based solutions that keep equity at the forefront of decision-making. Kezar and Holcombe (2017) contrasted shared leadership with "command and control" hierarchical models, illustrating that in a shared model, a greater number of individuals take on leadership roles, providing opportunity for emerging and innovative leaders. Importantly, leadership is not based on position, authority, or hierarchy in that individuals with the knowledge, expertise, and skills needed to find a solution are brought to the table, which emphasizes collaboration across and within the institution (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

The fundamental concepts of shared leadership in the context of higher education were described by Elrod and Ramaley (2020) and Sewerin and Holmberg (2017). According to these authors, distributed leadership requires a shared understanding of organizational culture, and through leadership, awareness contributes to greater collaboration across the institution.

Additionally, Kezar and Holcombe (2017) asserted that while leadership is a process, leaders in positions of authority are also critical in being able to delegate, leverage, and allocate resources as well as invite expertise within the organization into decision-making and incentivize innovation and collaboration.

Building on the concept of shared leadership and prior work on organizational change and equity in higher education, Kezar et al. (2021) conceptualized the framework of shared equity leadership as a broadly inclusive and collaborative approach to achieve equitable outcomes. They described the fundamental principles of shared equity leadership in the following way:

> At the heart of shared equity leadership is the notion of personal journey toward critical consciousness, in which leaders develop or strengthen a commitment to equity through their identity, personal experiences, or relationships and learning. Leaders' personal journeys help them develop the values necessary to share leadership for equity, as well as carry out the practices that enact this type of leadership. These values and practices are embodied and enacted by leaders collectively. (Kezar et al., 2021, p.vii).

Central to the concept of shared equity leadership is "equity-mindedness." As advanced by Dowd and Bensimon (2015) and described by Kezar et al. (2021), equity-mindedness is "an evidence-based, race-conscious, institutionally focused, systemically aware, and equity advancing approach to leadership" (p. 2). This leadership approach provides a framework for institutions to address long-standing issues of systemic racism and inequity in higher education (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015), responding to complex situations in an innovative and effective manner.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review provides the background and context for this study's research questions. It includes evidence that describes the culture of higher education in the United States, the systemic racism and inequity that exist within institutions, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, it provides an overview on the scholarship of leadership in higher education and how this field has evolved. Since higher education is facing two intense crises— one long-term and deeply embedded and the other recent and incredibly disruptive—an overview of leadership responses to both systemic racism and inequity and COVID-19 is included in the discussion of the literature.

The foundational research and literature on these topics date back more than five decades; however, the literature search was limited primarily to publications from the last three decades and some seminal sources. As described by Dowd and Bensimon (2015), many of the challenges, opportunities, and systemic inequities that were known five decades ago persist in American higher education. It is speculated that the COVID-19 pandemic and the public reckoning of racial injustice have caused a significant enough disruption that leaders can begin to address these challenges and confront systemic racism and inequity in institutions of higher education.

The Context of Higher Education

The post-modern era of the last five decades has been described as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (Bolman & Deal, 2015; Johansen, 2017; LeBlanc, 2018). Higher education during this time period has been characterized as disruptive, chaotic, and turbulent (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). There are ongoing tensions between long-held traditions and values,

societal expectations, and the pressures of the external world that are defining the role and purpose of higher education (Bellack, 2015; Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005; Kezar, 2008; Labaree, 2017; Thompson & Miller, 2018).

One approach or theory alone cannot address the complexity, nuances, practices, and structures of institutions of higher education (Manning, 2018). From organizational theory (Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Manning, 2018) to academic culture (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008) to perspectives on leadership (Bensimon, 1989; Bolman & Deal, 2017; Northouse, 2022), the complexity and ambiguity in which institutions of higher education operate requires a multi-modal leadership, management, and administrative approach. Birnbaum (1989, 1988) described this approach as "cybernetic," wherein organizational functions are monitored through feedback loops from various sectors and stakeholders within a university.

Birnbaum and Eckel (2005) asserted that there is no consensus on the purpose and societal function of higher education, nor how education should be provided and to whom. Not only is this ambiguity perceived by the general public, it is also the sentiment expressed by many who work within higher education (Cohen et al., 1972; Manning, 2018; Schrum, 2012). The narratives of the purpose and value of higher education once conveyed a sense of "education for democracy, for social justice, for development of the whole person" (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005, p. 352). However, for over a quarter century, there has been concern and debate about the shift in higher education's purpose from a social institution serving the public good to an industry serving the national economic engine (Kezar, 2004) by preparing students for jobs needed to support economic growth.

Social mobility and the promise of better jobs and security have always been rationales for higher education in the United States (Labaree, 2017). In California, the change in the

purpose of higher education may have occurred on February 28, 1967, when the Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, stated that the reason for a higher education is to prepare students for jobs, not to promote intellectual curiosity and personal growth (Berrett, 2015). After this statement, a period of divestment by the state in the funding of higher education began. The debate about the purpose of higher education continues today, yet a college degree continues to be considered a driver of social mobility and financial gain (Chan, 2016; Hrabowski III, 2019). Decreased state funding, tuition increases, and the ballooning of student debt, however, have made quantifying the value of a college education challenging (Manning, 2018), contributing to the lack of clarity on the purpose of higher education.

The Structure and Culture of Higher Education

Higher education is described as a "mature" industry that is less prone to being nimble, responsive, and innovative (Manning, 2018). It is also complex and dynamic, existing in two spaces that exert constant pressure and tension on one another. From an academic standpoint, higher education can be extremely innovative, while at the same time, it often remains impervious to change and resistant to administrative restructuring (Manning, 2018). The end result of substantive scholarly inquiry into this condition is a dynamic and diverse body of literature examining the complex structure and culture of higher education. Cohen et al. (1972) characterized higher education as "organized anarchies" built on a "loose collection of ideas [rather] than a coherent structure" (p. 1) in which constituents participate fluidly in processes that are not clearly understood.

The Cultures of Academic Institutions

In their foundational work on academic cultures, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) described six distinct cultures of the academy: collegial, managerial, developmental, advocacy, virtual, and

tangible. These cultures were expanded on by Manning (2018) in a description of organizational theories in higher education. Manning (2018) identified six additional organizational models that incorporate theorical foundations and disciplinary perspectives from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and political science: bureaucracy, collegium, cultural, feminist and gendered, institutional theory, organized anarchy, political, and spiritual. Both Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) and Manning (2018) described the primacy of the collegial or collegium model as the oldest, most recognized, and established culture in higher education. They asserted the remaining cultures and models are important for understanding how institutions of higher education function.

According to Manning (2018), the collegial culture of the academy, or collegium model, dates back to the 12th century and the earliest universities in Europe. It is fluid, decentralized, and emanates from the academic disciplines and professional expertise of the faculty (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). This culture aligns with shared leadership frameworks in that influence is distributed and contextual with an emphasis on personal responsibility and values over self-interest (Latta, 2020). Character-based leadership tends to align with the collegial culture of a university (Manning, 2018) with a focus on the attributes of the individual president or chancellor.

Managerial, or bureaucratic, culture is driven by economic accountability and the notion of a return on investment, or the "value" of a university education in terms of cost (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Labaree, 2017; Manning, 2018). Efficiency and competence are emphasized in this cultural framework (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). There is strong recognition of the authority of a single leader, with limited encouragement of participation from other subordinate members of the institution. This organizational model is often attributed to the role of the administration

within institutions of higher education (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008) and is prevalent in community colleges.

The developmental culture is congruent with the human resource leadership frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017), emphasizing faculty and staff development and promoting organizational well-being through strategic investments. Developmental culture is best captured by Manning's (2018) spiritual dimension of organizational theory in higher education. In this dimension, job motivation, satisfaction, and an understanding of how organizations are places where human agency is "acted and expressed" (Manning, 2018, p. 177).

The advocacy culture emerges in response to the bureaucratic and inequitable structure of institutions of higher education (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). This academic culture centers on concerns about academic freedom, loss of employment security, and systemic inequity in higher education. Constituents hold interests that are inherently in opposition to the status quo, which is perceived as fundamentally inequitable and repressive (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). This culture is best exemplified by the presence of unions on campus but also through collective action by staff, faculty, and students to effect change in institutional policies and practices. As a result, this culture lends itself to charismatic leadership to effect change (Latta, 2020) and aligns with Bolman and Deal's (2017) political frame of leadership. The advocacy culture reflects the presence of coalitions and other interest groups who band together to effect change toward a common purpose (Manning, 2018) centered on challenging the status quo.

The virtual culture of the academy emerged through the continued growth and use of technology in society and in higher education (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). The interface of higher education with information technology, globally networked information systems, big data, and social media was initially considered disruptive and loosened organizational boundaries

(Manning, 2018). In the pivot to remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual culture has become increasingly relevant, permanently altering higher education and the delivery of curricula (Johnson et al., 2020; Zhao, 2020). The virtual culture's loosening of organizational boundaries promotes leadership that is distributed, emergent, and adaptive (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008) as well as able to pivot quickly in response to changing conditions.

As with the symbolic leadership frame conceptualized by Bolman and Deal (2017), the tangible culture incorporates a nostalgic reprisal of the value of an in-person educational experience (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). This academic culture preserves and invests in institutional traditions and norms that promote the more traditional and symbolic role of the single servant leader at the helm (Manning, 2018). When an organization has a tangible culture, founding leaders and narratives continue to shape institutions even when they are no longer relevant (Kezar et al., 2006). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) noted that in times of stress and pressure, institutions will revert to fundamental form and function. For instance, in response to the collective move to remote instruction due to the public health threat of COVID-19, there was a reappraisal of the value of an in-person educational experience and the preservation of institutional traditions, such as in-person convocations, commencement celebrations, and athletic events.

Dynamic and Complementary Academic Cultures

Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) discussed the complementary tensions between the collegial and managerial cultures in colleges and universities resulting from the incompatibility of the professional authority of the faculty and the bureaucratic authority of the administration. Manning (2018) also described the dual prominence and tension between bureaucratic and collegium organizational models but focused less on the incompatibility of the models. However,

Manning (2018) emphasized that no one lens is complex enough to fully comprehend how institutions of higher education function and that any single lens is insufficient in the face of the current challenges facing higher education.

Many researchers describe colleges and universities as existing in dual structures of the hierarchical nature of administrative bureaucracy and faculty's professional expertise and authority over educational matters (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005; Manning, 2018). Governance in most institutions of higher education is frequently a shared responsibility of engagement with critical campus constituencies, most notably the faculty (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). Birnbaum (1989) argued that institutions of higher education are cybernetic organizations, with cybernetics defined as "the science of communication and control theory that is concerned especially with the comparative study of automatic control systems" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In complex, distributed, and dynamic organizations, there is no single omniscient entity coordinating the direction of the university. Rather, organizational functions are monitored through feedback loops from various sectors and stakeholders. Systems of negative feedback induce self-correction (Birnbaum, 1989) when something is out of alignment.

The complex nature of institutions of higher education, the conflicting pressures exerted upon them, and lack of understanding of how they function contributes to the notion of a "perfect mess" (Labaree, 2017) and "organized anarchies" (Cohen et al., 1972). With some exceptions, however, substantially lacking in most organizational theory or academic culture literature is an acknowledgement of the historical, structural, and institutional racism and inequity that permeates higher education (Harper, 2012; Kezar et al., 2021; Patton, 2016) reflecting society's structure and culture.

Systemic Racism and Inequity in Higher Education

The concept of educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006), which connects to socio-economic debt and property rights, provides a context for understanding how deeply embedded inequities in education are and provides a framework for the efforts necessary to correct these injustices. Patton (2016) and Gillborn (2005) asserted that educational institutions operate under a structure of White supremacy, connecting race, property, and oppression. Higher education in particular serves as the vehicle perpetuating White-centered knowledge and exclusion (Patton, 2016), and education scholars continue to challenge the dominant culture and the status quo in a movement toward greater access and equity (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Harper et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Patton, 2016). For many who work in colleges and universities, fighting for racial justice in the academy is not new, with an understanding that it takes a long time to dismantle institutional discrimination and racism (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Kendi, 2021; Kezar et al., 2008, 2021; Patton, 2016), which are reflections of societal norms.

Meritocracy and Grit

Although they are complex, dynamic, and highly variable, there are underlying commonalities among institutions of higher education. The majority are rooted in meritocracy that has been, in the U.S., guided and sustained by the dominant culture (Liu, 2011). The education meritocracy is fueled by racist and classist assumptions that hard work and grit are enough to overcome the systemic barriers faced by marginalized groups (Patton, 2016). The concept of "grit" was defined by Duckworth et al. (2007) as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress" (p. 1088). Deficit thinking blames the individual for their perceived lack of success or progress in a system that places systemic

barriers and obstacles before them (Smit, 2012). Grit ideology and deficit thinking are main themes in the narrative of educational meritocracy, yet these practices continue to marginalize the very communities institutions portend to support (Gorski, 2016; Patton, 2016), evidenced by the persistent inequity observed in higher education.

Discrimination at Multiple Scales

Pincus (2000) identified the ways in which discrimination manifests at different scales, specifically individual, institutional, and structural, and illustrated how this continues to be a challenge in higher education. Structural discrimination is the most difficult to confront, as it requires a true examination of cultural and societal values (Pincus, 2000). Ideal realms for challenging structural discrimination are educational institutions because of the central role education plays in societal change (Brennan, 2008).

Most educational systems were created with embedded structural racism and discrimination. For instance, tenure and promotion standards often exclude the scholarship of minority faculty (Settles et al., 2021), and ignore the teaching and service contributions of under-represented faculty members (Menges & Exum, 1983). Also contributing to disparate outcomes for women in academia is the lack of support for work-life balance; family formation and the presence of children are significant barriers to women securing tenure-track positions (Wolfinger et al., 2008).

In higher education, as in other sectors of society, discrimination is manifested at all three scales. Individual and institutional racism were documented in Lincoln and Stanley's (2021) qualitative inquiry of barriers to faculty advancement. They described structural discrimination through policies that appeared race and gender neutral, such as the recruitment and retention of faculty, and assessment of productivity through journal publications and funded research

(Lincoln & Stanley, 2021). These processes were found to harm specific groups, particularly through "business as usual" practices (Lincoln & Stanley, 2021). Through seven case scenarios, the authors identified four largely invisible dimensions of institutional discrimination in the academy: standard operating procedures related to promotion and merit; the lack of mentorship for faculty of color that reinforces biases in institutional culture; biased beliefs within disciplinary cultures and epistemic exclusion; and institutional norms that perpetuate institutional membership (or lack thereof). Lincoln and Stanley (2021) emphasized that standard operating procedures often discriminate on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Gender Inequity in Higher Education

The opportunities for women in higher education has grown strong since World War II. Further, significant inroads into the academy have been made by women and minoritized faculty since Menges and Exum (1983) published their work on barriers to these populations' progress almost four decades ago. For instance, the increasing number of female undergraduates and diversity of the student body points to increased access and opportunity; however, many of the barriers described by Menges and Exum (1983) remain prevalent. They found that at every juncture in the path to senior academic positions, and women and minorities are more likely than White males to leave the profession. The tenure review process is the one point in which these faculty members experience the greatest and most pervasive difficulties, specifically increased service loads, inadequate "family-friendly" policies, lack of support and advocacy, outdated criteria, and arbitrary standards (Menges & Exum, 1983). In a study of the American Association of University Professors, Monroe and Chiu (2010) reported over a decade ago that gender equality in institutions of higher education had still not been attained.

One metaphor frequently used to describe the educational journey of students from K-12 to higher education, particularly the trajectory of female and students of color into STEM fields is the pipeline metaphor. This metaphor suggests a linear, one-way flow of students through the educational system, ultimately leading to the labor market, including as faculty in higher education (Cannady et al., 2014; Soe & Yakura, 2008). Castleman and Allen (1998) criticized the use of the pipeline metaphor to describe the slow but steady path towards gender equality in academia, identifying three reasons why it is inappropriate. First, they asserted that this metaphor disregards the inherent gender power dynamics within organizations. In higher education, senior faculty and administrative positions are occupied predominately by White men. Second, there is a lack of acknowledgement that girls, and especially girls of color, are discouraged from studies in STEM fields, which contributes to the narrative that there are not enough qualified women or minority candidates in an applicant pool. Third, and most importantly, they identified the pipeline is a poor model for social change because it ignores the systemic, structural and institutional discrimination present in higher education reflected in the effects of seemingly neutral policies on the advancement of marginalized populations in academic ranks and how active intervention is needed to effect change (Lincoln & Stanley, 2021).

Women in academic leadership positions have often described their advancement in the academy to higher level positions as unsustainable and unrealistic, primarily due to institutional policies and practices that are not supportive of their life circumstances (Chesterman et al., 2005; Eddy et al., 2017; Wolfinger et al., 2008). While the numbers overall point to greater representation of women in higher education, there remain arenas in which they have not made traction, and focusing only on aggregate trends distracts from addressing the actual structures and narratives that perpetuate the inequity (Eddy et al., 2017; Wolfinger et al., 2008). The

COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted and exacerbated existing structural barriers to the advancement of women faculty (Malisch et al., 2020) and offered an opportunity to examine those barriers and effect change.

Racial Inequity in Higher Education

Deep racial inequity continues to manifest in higher education, and this has been well documented in the scholarship of the last few decades (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Turner et al., 2008; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). At the same time, much of the literature surrounding higher education has minimized the systemic racist and inequitable norms that remain pervasive in colleges and universities (Harper, 2012). This omission in the literature is juxtaposed with the well-documented experiences of minoritized faculty, students and administrators and the barriers they encounter during educational attainment and career advancement (S. Hurtado et al., 1999; Lincoln & Stanley, 2021; Menges & Exum, 1983; Solorzano et al., 2000; Tran, 2014; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015; Yosso et al., 2009). According to Patton (2016):

> Higher education still represents the complex relations between race, property, and oppression. Despite the growth and change in U.S. demographics, the academy is an overwhelmingly White terrain in terms of physical representation of White students and symbolically in terms of curriculum, campus policies, and campus spaces. (p. 320)

Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) reviewed four decades of research focused on diversity and the leadership of African American administrators in higher education. They concluded that one of the fundamental barriers to access and representation is that administrative titles are considered "whiteness property" (Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015, p. 667), which in turn reinforces long-standing discriminatory norms of access and privilege (Patton, 2016). Recent data

published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* (2021) showed that three-quarters of "management" positions in institutions of higher education are occupied by White administrators. Evidence indicated that the same rationales used to explain disparate gender representation are utilized to explain racial disparities in faculty and administrative positions: leaky pipelines and small pools of qualified candidates (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Gasman et al., 2015).

Female faculty and leaders of color in higher education contend with gender bias and discrimination at the intersection of race (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Muñoz, 2009). For instance, Turner (2002) conducted a study of academic leaders and found that White women had seen gains in representation in leadership roles through sponsorship and support toward higher level positions. However, the same advances had not occurred for women leaders of color who reported feeling greater isolation while experiencing higher visibility, stereotyping, scrutiny, and stress. Turner's (2002) study found that women of color encountered barriers at every intersection to achieving their professional goals (tenure, promotion, and advancement), suggesting that to succeed, they needed to leave part of their identity, i.e., their racial and ethnic identity, at the door. In this study, many expressed tremendous pressure to conform to the dominant culture, which did not guarantee advancement or success.

In a qualitative study, Fong-Batkin (2011) chronicled the experiences of women leaders of color in community colleges as they advanced in their careers. Issues of race and gender were found to be significant, and manifested as overt racism, microaggressions, and the pressure to subvert their identity and assimilate to the dominant White male paradigm (Fong-Batkin, 2011). Complementing this finding was the resilience of the participants to persist and succeed though mentorship and supportive networks, strategies that have been proven to counter the barriers

faculty and leaders of color face in higher education (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Muñoz, 2009; Tran, 2014).

Gasman et al. (2015) conducted a broad analysis of diversity and senior leadership at elite, Ivy League institutions and discovered similar patterns: references to weak pipelines, lack of qualified candidates, and under-representation of men and women of color in senior leadership positions. The authors offered recommendations that could reverse these trends, such as improving diverse recruitment practices, developing a diverse leadership pipeline through faculty ranks, and ensuring congruence between institutional missions of improving diversity, equity, and actual policies and practice (Gasman et al., 2015). This echoes the call to address systemic barriers that promote inequity in leadership ranks in higher education (Eddy, 2003; Malisch et al., 2020).

COVID and Racial Injustices in Higher Education: Twin Pandemics (2020-2021)

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the systemic racism and depth of inequity that exists in higher education (J. Cole et al., 2021; Copley & Douthett, 2020; Stephens et al., 2020). This exacerbation has been experienced in all constituencies, specifically faculty (Johnson et al., 2020; Malisch et al., 2020; Stephens et al., 2020), staff (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020) and students (Casey, 2020; Hartzell et al., 2021; Robbins, 2020). The disproportionate experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic based on race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status are still being documented, yet as described previously, the manifestation of inequity in higher education is not a new phenomenon.

Several researchers have already published findings related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on publication rates of female faculty members (Bell & Fong, 2021; Krukowski et al., 2020) and the American Association for the Advancement of Science has called for new

strategies to decrease the long-standing gender inequity in STEM fields (Malisch et al., 2020). In a *New York Times* article, Casey (2020) described how the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the actual income inequality that exists in America and suggested these disparities could no longer be ignored due to the increase in remote classroom environments.

In a special issue of the *Journal of Higher Education Management* devoted to the "twin pandemics," guest editors J. Cole et al. (2021) reaffirmed the role that higher education must play in dismantling systemic racism. The authors also argued that institutions of higher education are complicit in contributing to ongoing inequity. Despite decades of effort to address equity gaps between White students and low-income, first-generation students of color, many colleges and universities have struggled with implementing effective methods (Ash et al., 2020; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Kezar et al., 2021). The lack of progress toward truly equitable systems have been attributed to the unwillingness of many institutions of higher education to acknowledge the impact of systemic racism and oppression in the academy (Ash et al., 2020; Patton, 2016).

In calling higher education leaders to action and to a commitment to anti-racist praxis, Hurtado (2021) focused on the importance of leadership and interest convergence, or the concept that the needs of students of color are addressed only when these converge with the needs of White students (Bell Jr., 1980). Referencing Patton's (2016) proposition that White supremacy is deeply embedded in higher education, Hurtado (2021) proposed that in order to develop an adaptive leadership response that is grounded in equity, power, privilege, and oppression must also be acknowledged as relevant to maintaining the status quo.

Seven steps, identified by Choo (2020) and adapted by Hurtado (2021), were relevant to this study. Since the COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that addressing the United States' racist societies and structures are a matter of life and death, concrete and focused action,

commitment, discipline, ambition, boldness, and money are needed (Choo, 2020, p. 157). While the seven steps were developed for the context of health care, they are applicable to higher education.

First, organizations need to move away from symbolic gestures such as a "diversity agenda" (Brown, 2021; Tichavakunda, 2021) and develop specific, actionable goals to address structural racism and build equitable spaces. Second, organizations should aim high with these goals, and not default to the appeasing the status quo. Third, institutional goals must be linked to metrics. Fourth, organizations should push to identify effective interventions to combat systemic racism. Fifth, organizations must thoroughly eliminate racist and discriminatory practices from processes and policies. Sixth, organizations must diversify the leadership workforce, bringing equity to positions of power. Finally, organizations must financially invest in dismantling racism over the long term.

Leadership in Higher Education

The scholarship of leadership in higher education has evolved since its inception in the late nineteenth century and this is reflected in the hundreds of theories, ideas, and conceptual models that exist (Hoff, 1999; Hunt & Fedynich, 2019; Johns & Moser, 1989; Northouse, 2022). Despite the volume of research and scholarship focused on the subject, there is no consistent, universal definition of what constitutes leadership, because models of leadership in higher education draw from multiple disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and political science (Bensimon, 1989; Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005; Bolman & Deal, 2017; Goleman, 1998; Johns & Moser, 1989). As such, a consensus on what defines leadership, or what constitutes "effective leadership," remains elusive (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Bryman, 2007; Newmann, 2012).

Scholarship until the 1960s focused on the characteristics of the individual leader (Bensimon, 1989, 1990; Eddy, 2003; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Mills, 2004; Muñoz, 2009; Smerek, 2011). In early studies of higher education leadership, the university president was viewed as the embodiment of leadership and essential to an institution's persona (Mills, 2004). Traditional terms used to define university presidents included rational, politically savvy, clear communicator, and well-developed interpersonal skills that are utilized to garner support for a common vision among followers (Bensimon, 1990). These leadership roles require enormous personal investment, and there is also acknowledgement that because of this, these are not sustainable positions for individuals in these roles. Birnbaum and Eckel (2005) described the perpetual challenges of university leadership, and the unrealistic expectations set for university presidents both personally and professionally.

Leadership paradigms in academic institutions range from deeply hierarchical leader-follower structures to more dynamic leadership philosophies (Bolman & Gallos, 2010; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Kezar, 2012; Schaufeli, 2015). According to most research, successful college and university leaders incorporate a degree of innovation (J. Cole et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2020; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016), agility and flexibility (Bensimon, 1989; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020), communication (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017b; Thompson & Miller, 2018), and team empowerment (Druskat & Wheeler, 2003; Hirschy, 2011; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). The ability to distribute responsibilities across the organization, with an emphasis on autonomy and trust, has been cited as a critical characteristic of effective leaders in higher education (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; van Tuin et al., 2020) and is reflected in a shared leadership model.

Effective Leadership

Although it is poorly defined, scholars have attempted to understand the behaviors and conditions that promote "effective leadership." In an overview of the literature, Bryman (2007) posed the question: "What styles of or approaches to leadership are associated with effective leadership in higher education?" This question was primarily addressed though anecdotal reflection and research on what leaders do rather than empirical inquiry (Bryman, 2007). Nonetheless, several leadership behaviors were identified as essential to effective leadership, including providing a strategic vision and sense of direction, trustworthiness and integrity, clear communication, creating a positive atmosphere, fairness, advocating for needed resources, and encouraging constituents to participate in decision-making and goal-setting. Many of these behaviors align with Bolman and Deal's (2017) four frames of leadership, particularly the human resource and symbolic frames and Northouse's (2022) definitions of authentic, adaptive and servant leadership.

Northouse (2022) considers leadership behaviors described as "effective" by Bryman (2007) to fit in the realm of moral leadership and includes authentic, adaptive, and servant leadership in this category. Authentic leaders reflect on their own values, are aware and transparent, elevate the needs of their team above their own, and work toward common goals (Northouse, 2022). Elements of servant leadership include trust, authenticity, building community, encouraging growth and success of constituents, putting constituents and communities first, empathy, healing, and awareness (Northouse, 2022). Northouse (2022) posited that this type of leadership style is not trait-based but rather are developed and nurtured over time through a leader's ethical positions and psychological strengths.

Thompson and Miller (2018) suggested that although effective models for leadership in higher education remain elusive, necessary skills for successful leadership are "agility, inter-professionalism, civility, and strategic, emotionally intelligent communication" (p. 5). According to Thompson and Miller (2018), these characteristics are interconnected and are most useful if individuals in leadership positions also engage in self-reflection and a commitment to continuous development while understanding the tensions, contexts, and challenges facing higher education.

Leaders who recognize the essential importance of supporting the basic psychological needs of employees promote freedom and engagement by articulating a clear and compelling vision and inviting participation in the creation of that vision (van Tuin et al., 2020). Contemporary approaches to leadership and governance, such as shared leadership and shared equity leadership, illustrate the transition from more hierarchical "command" systems to leadership philosophies that favor inclusion, participation, autonomy, and co-creation (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016; van Tuin et al., 2020). These shifts in leadership styles may lead to creative and innovative solutions to the long-standing challenges facing higher education, such as systemic racism and inequity.

Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman's (1998) seminal work on leadership first described the concept of "emotional intelligence" and its applicability to leadership. The concept was further developed through a study of over 200 large companies (Goleman, 2017). The research challenged the idea that leadership characteristics, such as intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision, which have traditionally defined successful leadership styles. Goleman (1998) instead emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence. He proposed that truly effective leaders display emotional

intelligence through the following characteristics: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 2017).

In a case study of 11 academic leaders, Parrish (2015) found that emotional intelligence was recognized as a highly relevant and important element of effective academic leadership. Participants emphasized that "empathy, inspiring and guiding others and responsibly managing oneself" (Parrish, 2015, p. 829) were crucial for effective academic leadership. The authors suggested that while the necessary balance of cognitive intelligence and emotional intelligence has been examined in the business sector, little work has been done to examine emotional intelligence in leaders in higher education. Goleman's theoretical framework and subsequent work by Parrish (2015) supported the idea that emotional intelligence is an essential component of effective leadership in higher education.

Leaders who understand how to frame themselves in the context of their organizations are better equipped to transform the status quo (Bolman & Deal, 1991). In her seminal work on university presidents, Bensimon (1989) utilized Bolman and Deal's (1984) leadership theory to examine what constitutes effective leadership. Bensimon found that those who adopted a multi-frame approach to leadership had an enhanced ability to shift in response to situational conditions. The findings of this study also revealed that individual leaders who operate from a multi-frame perspective are rare. Bensimon (1989) and Bensimon and Neumann (1993) suggested that rather than searching for leaders who possess this unique attribute, a better strategy may be to assemble complementary teams that approach their work through different leadership lenses.

Leadership and Institutional Culture

Latta's (2020) cultural interaction model of leadership and power (LP-CIM) explains how leadership theory, power, and influence interact to predict the success of leaders in achieving goals in the context of institutional culture. This model incorporates Bergquist and Pawlak's (2008) six cultures of the academy and predicts that leaders are successful as long as their leadership praxis and influence tactics align with institutional norms and culture (Latta, 2020). The LP-CIM is based on the premise that the cultural norms of the institution constrain leadership responses to challenges in that actions need to align with institutional values in order to be successful (Latta, 2020). There may be consequences of a mismatch of leadership and institutional culture, but as described by Bergquist and Pawlak (2008), organizational culture is never uniform. Instead, it is the dynamic interplay of all the cultures of the academy simultaneously.

According to Kezar and Holcombe (2017), higher education has yet to adopt a responsive leadership model. It continues to rely on the ideal of the heroic single leader, and most professional reward systems are developed and distributed to support the accomplishments of the individual (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). The structure of academic institutions is built to support this model (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Birnbaum, 1988). However, the hierarchical practices of leadership built for centralized organizations no longer appear to be effective in a world that is complex, decentralized, and distributed (Birnbaum, 1989; Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005; Holcombe et al., 2021; Johansen, 2017; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Shared and Distributed Models of Leadership

Although an individual leader is essential to the functioning of a university, Hoff (1999) challenged the notion that all leadership is found at the top of an organizational chart and

advocated for a leadership philosophy in which faculty, staff, and students co-create a collaborative and inclusive campus community. Institutions of higher education require adaptive leaders who encourage reflection, the ability to see a long-term vision, an understanding of roles, relationships, and the culture, values, and priorities of the institution. Similarly, Holcombe et al. (2021) suggested that higher education is migrating away from the concept of leadership as the characteristics of one person. Instead, there is an increasing view that leadership is a process taking place among teams of people with a shared goal or vision leveraging different perspectives (Holcombe et al., 2021).

In a distributed leadership model, leaders are dispersed across an organization, horizontally, and vertically (Spillane et al., 2004). Research on distributed and shared leadership paradigms suggested these styles led to overwhelmingly positive outcomes for both individuals and organizations (DeRue, 2011; Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Kezar and Holcombe (2017) identified the conditions needed for organizations, particularly in higher education, to thrive under a shared leadership model: "team empowerment, supportive leaders in the hierarchy, autonomy, shared purpose, vision or goal, coaching, accountability, interdependence, fairness and shared cognition" (p. 9). Considering the culture of academic institutions (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008), and the historical focus on individual leaders in higher education (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005), the shared leadership model recognizes the importance of leaders in positions of authority, emphasizing leadership as a process and not simply an individual endeavor (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Formal leaders support the distribution of leadership across the institution; however, these executive leaders still play an essential political role in the institutional leverage of relationships, power, and resources.

Bolden et al. (2009) challenged distributed leadership as a concept, suggesting that it provides little more clarity than the concept of leadership. However, they also proposed that it is useful as an analytical framework in that it highlights the complexity and context of higher education. Institutions of higher education are often described as siloed and decentralized, suggesting that a distributed or shared model of leadership are most effective.

Equity-Minded Leadership and Shared Equity Leadership

Dowd and Bensimon (2015) described the essential role that equity-minded leaders play in transforming institutions. A leadership team defines the values, direction, and priorities of an institution and when committed to an equity agenda, is characterized by being evidence-based, race-conscious, institutionally focused, and systemically aware (Kezar et al., 2021). Ash et al. (2020) proposed that to dismantle the systemic racism and inequity in higher education, leaders in higher education, particularly White leaders, should engage in a shared equity leadership journey that incorporates personal transformation toward critical consciousness and develop a greater understanding of systems of Whiteness, power, and oppression.

LePeau (2015) conducted a qualitative study using a grounded theory approach to examine partnerships between student affairs and academic affairs in advancing diversity and inclusion on campus. The analysis revealed five critical influences on partnerships: addressing issues of exclusion, understanding the institutional mission, leadership, social gadflies or challengers to the status quo, and the insertion of outside groups (LePeau, 2015). With respect to shared equity leadership between academic affairs and student affairs, LePeau (2015) found that these units constructed partnerships that were complementary, coordinated, and pervasive.

Leadership Responses to Crisis in Higher Education

A crisis response has essential elements that center around clear communication: explaining what happened, offering guidance, instilling hope, showing empathy, and suggesting that the organization's leadership is in control of the situation (Boin et al., 2016; Gigliotti, 2020). Crises that impact higher education encompass natural disasters (Goswick et al., 2018), campus tragedies (Treadwell et al., 2019), student protests (Gerstmann, 2018), and racial unrest (Fortunato et al., 2018). Crises are disruptive and can take on a life of their own (Gigliotti, 2020), and in the chaos and uncertainty that is created, leadership is needed and should be defined (Koehn, 2020). Additionally, the development of foundational relationships with stakeholders, both within and outside the institution, long before a crisis emerges is essential to effectively navigating challenges (Fortunato et al., 2017).

In a phenomenological study of the 1999 Texas A&M Bonfire collapse, Treadwell et al. (2019) provided retrospective insights of administrators as they recounted their experiences in the response to the tragedy. The lessons learned from this horrific event provided important lessons about university responses to crises: a campus response is deeply influenced by the pre-existing institutional context and culture. Further, these contexts and cultures are highly personal and emotional events that shape and are shaped by individual participants for years to come. This study also showed that numerous positive outcomes can be studied by other institutions to improve their own practices in the future.

Using a multi-case study approach, Mills (2004) examined presidential action during crisis scenarios, identified the frames that were most significant, and considered whether these leadership actions were primarily symbolic or instrumental. Mills (2004) concluded that in chaotic moments, decisive control is the most effective leadership paradigm. The president's

symbolic role is one of sensemaking, interpretation, and communication of events, which provides a sense of direction during a crisis. The instrumental role is an equally important manifestation of the power of the president in a crisis: making decisions, setting a course, providing guidance, but not micromanaging. These findings mirror the concept of distributed and adaptive leadership discussed by Janssen and van der Voort (2020) and Sewerin and Holmberg (2017), ensuring that during a crisis teams are empowered and encouraged to make critical decisions in alignment with the shared goals of an institution.

In a case study, Goswick et al. (2018) utilized Bolman and Deal's (2017) leadership framework to examine the Joplin School District's response to a devastating tornado in Joplin, Missouri. Their findings reinforced the importance of communication and emotional support (human resource frame), building coalitions before a crisis (political frame), creating vision and meaning (symbolic frame), and ensuring that resources are in place (structural frame). The most essential element, however, was leadership reflection, which set the tone and direction of the institutional response. The findings of the study by Goswick et al. (2018) resulted in a set of lessons learned that could be used to guide other educational institutions in their preparation for the next inevitable crisis and reinforce the notion that leadership frames are not only interdependent but highly contextual.

Leadership Responses to Racial Injustice

Racial injustices on campuses are an ongoing manifestation of systemic racism and inequity in higher education, which are also a reflection of the dominant culture. The manner and tone of leaders' responses to racial incidents are a direct reflection of university priorities (E. R. Cole & Harper, 2017). Often, university responses to racial incidents are perceived as inauthentic

and protective of the institution (Fortunato et al., 2018) rather than as an opportunity to initiate real efforts to address racial inequity on campus.

For example, in an analysis of university communications in anticipation of the grand jury announcement of the potential indictment of the White police officer who shot and killed Michael Brown, Lucas, Jr. et al. (2015) found that institutional responses were primarily focused on university branding. The authors did not discover any agenda setting on the part of the institution but did identify potential "fear mongering" and use of language that could be interpreted as "provocative micro-aggressions" (Lucas, Jr. et al., 2015). The messages that fell into these categories were sent by university executives and influential members of the community whose tone could swing the public's perception of the safety of the campus, which created lasting impressions of the priorities of the institution.

University presidents usually issue statements in response to racially motivated incidents on campuses (E. R. Cole & Harper, 2017). Over a three-year period, E. R. Cole and Harper (2017) found that presidential responses often mention the specific racial incident that occurred in general terms with little significant detail provided. Consequently, presidential statements were directed to those responsible for committing the racist act yet did not acknowledge the systemic and institutional racism that permitted this behavior in the first place (E. R. Cole & Harper, 2017). Presidents often used these statements as an opportunity to reaffirm a campus' commitment to equity diversity and inclusion, and that these racial incidents run counter to the values of the institution. E. R. Cole and Harper (2017) noted that the almost universal lack of reference on the part of leadership to the long history of exclusion, racism, and discrimination on their campuses and in higher education is problematic. This diminishes the effectiveness of the response and reflects the systemic and institutional norms of exclusion in higher education

(Harper, 2012). Since racial incidents on campus are a constant and carefully edited ambiguous messages do little to confront campus racism, it was suggested that presidential statements should be reimagined as a tool to begin authentic and meaningful dialogue about race, racism, and inequity in higher education (E. R. Cole & Harper, 2017).

In response to a crisis on campus, those in leadership are in positions of power to determine the outcome. In a study examining the social unrest that occurred at the University of Missouri in response to the 2015 shooting of Michael Brown by a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, Fortunato et al. (2018) operationalized three critical areas of crisis communication inquiry: the role of the relationship with stakeholders, approaches to design and delivery of response, and sensemaking. The main findings of the study highlighted the vulnerabilities of internal organization in the context of external conditions for which they were unprepared. Four areas of disconnect between theoretical best practices in crisis management and the decisions and actions of officials at the university were identified: (1) building strong relationships with key stakeholder groups rooted in communication; (2) using those stakeholder relationships to predict, recognize, and address issues before they reached crisis levels; (3) delivery of timely and sensitive messages through adequate information flow; and (4) ability to prevent recurrence by analyzing lessons learned. The authors reiterated that a crisis that reveals organizational vulnerabilities can lead to greater scrutiny and possibly more negative outcomes related to the core values of the institution (Fortunato et al., 2018). Ultimately, this study illustrated a failure of leadership that relied on a command-and-control management style to respond to a complex and volatile situation.

Tichavakunda (2021) provided a critical analysis of racial redress and argued that policy revisions, re-naming or un-naming places, and university statements are merely symbolic. The

author defined these actions as symbolic representations with abstract value; racial symbols that do little to address long-established racist, exclusionary institutional norms; and have little impact on the lived experiences of marginalized members of a university community. The study focused on the experiences of Black students in predominately White institutions and presented four elements of a conceptual framework that could inform future research: (1) racial symbols can have more abstract that practical utility; (2) racial symbols are significant and have meaning to both dominant and marginalized groups; (3) racial symbols are more likely to be offered in place of real structural policy changes; and (4) racial symbols hamper progress toward social justice (Tichavakunda, 2021). Ultimately, the author proposed that racial symbols without meaningful policy change do little to improve the educational outcomes of marginalized students.

Leadership Responses to COVID-19

In the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, research and scholarship on leadership specific to this crisis began to emerge. Although systemic racism and inequity are long-term issues, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the core of higher education (Zhao, 2020). As a matter of public health, leadership responses to the COVID-19 crisis occurred quickly and decisively (Janssen & van der Voort, 2020) and with sound analysis to avoid outbreaks on campus (Fox et al., 2021; Robbins, 2020), often with mixed results.

The successes and failures of leadership were evident in the rapid and necessary response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The autonomous nature of academia quickly became a liability as the skills normally required of university leadership were not adapting in response to the pandemic (Coyne et al., 2020). The rapid move to remote instruction in response to COVID-19 revealed how unprepared many institutions were to support faculty members in delivering

curricula online (Johnson et al., 2020). It was found that women faculty members were differentially burdened with educating their children alongside maintaining their faculty activities (Bell & Fong, 2021). Socioeconomic and racial disparities became more evident as the pandemic progressed (Krukowski et al., 2020; Trainer et al., 2021), and the mental health of all university constituents dramatically emerged as an additional crisis (Sahu, 2020) with few resources to address the growing need.

In one of the first published studies on academic leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dumulescu and Muţiu (2021) conducted a qualitative inquiry into university leaders' response to the COVID-19 pandemic at a Romanian university. They focused on the processes underlying leadership decisions and actions during the second half of the 2019 to 2020 academic year, performing semi-structured interviews with 11 academic leaders. From the interviews, three themes were identified: leadership attributes, unity through decentralization, and opportunities to reinvent the university. In leadership attributes, "responsibility" was described as a proxy for effective leadership, followed by "leadership experience" and "an adaptable mindset" (Dumulescu & Muţiu, 2021). The second theme of unity through decentralization focused on autonomy balanced with community and trust in the ability and competence of colleagues. The study revealed the sense of opportunity among academic leadership for reinventing the university in a post-pandemic world.

Coyne et al. (2020) identified poor communication from university leadership as one of the failures in response to the crisis. The authors exposed the weaknesses of university structures, which were often too decentralized and bureaucratic to be able to marshal key leaders quickly, and precious time was devoted to decisions by committee and consensus. They also emphasized the need for leaders in a crisis to be decisive and direct, to communicate decisions clearly

without ambiguity, and to provide guidance and clear direction. Boin et al. (2016) echoed this observation regarding crisis leadership: leaders need to explain what happened, offer guidance, instill hope, show empathy, and affirm that they are in control of the situation.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This chapter provides an overview of the research design, study sample, setting, and data collection and analysis utilized to investigate the research questions. The purpose of this study was to capture and understand the experiences of leadership in the context of institutional culture, systemic racism and inequity in higher education, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The complexity, immediacy, and severity of the crises argued for a qualitative investigation. This study was conducted utilizing a qualitative methodological approach using semi-structured interviews and supporting qualitative documents. Qualitative studies represent a "search for meaning and understanding, with the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive (where) understanding is the primary rationale for the investigation" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 238). A qualitative approach sheds light on the nuances of individual experiences that is harder to capture through a quantitative methodology.

A qualitative method is best suited to examine the process through which events and actions take place (Maxwell, 2012) in that the inquiry occurs "at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 257). Additionally, the inquiry is "based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience or phenomenon" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). A qualitative approach focuses on the process rather than outcomes (Maxwell, 2012), which was the focus of this study.

Methodology is highly dependent on the research questions, the context and situation of the research, the researcher, and the best mechanism to answer the questions (Maxwell, 2012).

As suggested by Maxwell (2012), "there is no way to convert research questions into methods, that methods are the means by which to answer your questions, not a logical transformation of the latter" (p. 100). Utilizing a qualitative methodology facilitated capturing the nuances of each individuals' experience, while considering leadership as a collective process.

Site and Sample

The site for this study was a large, public, research-intensive university in the western United States. In fall 2021, the undergraduate population exceeded 30,000, and the graduate student population neared 9,500. Nearly half of the undergraduate student population was first generation. Similarly, nearly half of the total student population was from a low-income household, with over a third of undergraduates eligible for Pell grants. Over a third of students identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, nearly a quarter identified as Hispanic/Latinx, and one fifth identified as White. The Black/African American student population was greatly underrepresented compared to state demographics (under 5%), as were those students who identified as Native American or Indigenous.

The research site was selected for three reasons. First, the convenience and access to participants in leadership positions afforded by the researcher's position within the university. Second, like many universities worldwide, this campus implemented a comprehensive response to COVID-19 beginning in March 2020 that had been well documented. Third, the campus had set a strong agenda for equity, diversity, and inclusion in its strategic plan. This agenda was identified as one of the university's five goals, and was specifically articulated through a strategic plan for inclusive excellence focused on access and success, campus climate, and accountability.

Maxwell (2012) suggested that a critical element of this type of qualitative inquiry is understanding the context of the activity, phenomenon, or experience and how this impacts the actions of the participants. Typical purposive or purposeful sampling was utilized to select participants, along with materials and documents that best served the researcher in understanding the problem under study. The objective of purposeful sampling is to select "the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 97). The sample included participants serving in university leadership roles. The participants were both formal and informal leaders who planned or executed response activities, assessed the impact of decisions, and advised the executive leadership team, including public health and medical experts, executive and academic leadership, and other strategic and operational directors (Jacobsen, 2010).

The participant sample totaled ten individuals who were selected from the university's executive leadership by virtue of their position within the university and/or their scope of responsibility during the crises. I selected participants through purposeful sampling to ensure that I achieved a balance of gender, race and ethnicity, and positionality. Four participants self-identified as men and six as women. Most served in executive management roles; however, at least two subjects were included due to their leadership in response to the crises. Two participants self-identified as LGBTQIA. Four of the ten participants self-identified as leaders of color.

I gained access to each of the participants through the appropriate channels of communication, following established protocol, via phone or email, and by interfacing with administrative staff supporting the participants. To provide context for the interview, I provided

a short summary of the study to participants, with the purpose of the study and methodology clearly stated, along with the semi-structured interview questions (Appendix A).

Data Collection

This study utilized a basic qualitative design with two data sources, interviews and other qualitative data related to the response to COVID-19 and racially motivated events. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews served as the primary data collection instrument. Other qualitative documents provided support, offered context, and were used as reference points during the interviews. These included publicly available media such as video statements, media interviews, timelines of events, and campus communications. Prior to data collection, I pilot tested my interview questions with non-participants (Maxwell, 2012) to help refine the interview protocol.

Most of the participants in this study served in roles at the executive leadership level and fit Natow's (2020) definition of "elite": "an individual who holds or has held some powerful position that has afforded the individual unique knowledge or information from a privileged perspective" (p. 160). While triangulation is typically utilized in qualitative research to support a study through multiple methods or sources of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), Natow (2020) observed that the most frequently cited reason for using triangulation in elite interviews was to address validity threats. Harvey (2011) considered document review as a primary method of triangulation when interviewing individuals with power or privilege. This method was included in this study through the review of other qualitative documents described above.

In order to understand the university's leadership response, the interview questions were structured to gather rich, thick descriptions of the setting and context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The questions guided participants in reflecting on their own leadership praxis, awareness, and the university's response to COVID-19 in the context of

systemic inequity. The semi-structured, open-ended questions provided flexibility and opportunities to explore new ideas and examine different perspectives of leadership (Goswick et al., 2018). Interview questions were structured to invite participants' reflection on their own leadership philosophy, perceptions of the structure and culture of the institution, and whether these facilitated or hindered equity-minded decisions in response to the dual crises. Reviews of timelines and institutional documents provided additional insight and triangulation of data to create a more complete understanding of the problem under study. I kept detailed field notes during each interview, which were appended to each recorded interview transcript. At the end of each interview, I engaged in analytic memo-writing to capture my own thoughts, perceptions, and insights (Saldaña, 2016) and to reflect on my own insider positionality.

Interviews were conducted and recorded virtually via Zoom. Prior to each interview, I provided information to participants about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, the anonymization of their identity, and the interview questions that would guide our discussion. Informed consent was collected verbally prior to each interview (Appendix A). Recordings were stored in a secure, password-protected cloud-based repository, and were destroyed at the end of the project. The UC Davis Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the protocol prior to the initiation of the research.

Data Analysis

The inductive process of qualitative inquiry involves building patterns and themes from the ground up, organizing the data into codes and categories, and then deductively returning to the data to develop a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study (Saldaña, 2016). I utilized this process to identify and categorized themes to identify larger patterns for interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), engaging in a process of reviewing, organizing, and assessing the

transcript data through multiple cycles of coding. Saldaña (2016) suggested that through this method, codes are recoded, creating an iterative process from which themes and patterns emerge.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim using the manual transcription service Scribie (2022). I reviewed the audio recordings alongside the transcripts within 48 hours of receipt of the transcripts to ensure accuracy. Immediately upon conducting the interviews, I reviewed my field notes and engaged in analytic memo writing to reflect how I related to the participants' answers to the research questions (Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, while listening to the audio recordings alongside the transcripts, I further engaged in analytic memo writing to capture emerging themes and connections between interview subjects.

The transcripts and interview audio files were imported into Atlas.ti (2022), a qualitative analysis software program. To develop an initial coding framework, I created a set of preliminary codes drawn from my theoretical frameworks: the four frames of leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2017), the six cultures of the academy (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008), shared leadership, and shared equity leadership (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Kezar et al., 2021). I conducted an initial round of open (initial) in vivo coding, highlighting relevant quotes and words from the transcripts, while simultaneously listening to the audio files. While reviewing the data, I created an index of codes in an Excel spreadsheet, with codes, definitions, subcodes, and supporting quotes and statements from research participants. These were then organized in the context of my research questions.

The interview transcripts were analyzed through a cyclical process of open (initial), in vivo, and process coding, categorizing the information from the interviews. This coding process allowed me to develop a sense of connections between research subjects, while maintaining flexibility to capture nuances (being able to go back and recode, not having to hard code the

data). The codes were "recoded" and re-evaluated through the code manager in Atlas.ti (2022) throughout the iterative data analysis process.

Throughout the first and second cycle coding rounds, I produced additional reflective analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016). In order to begin to understand a phenomenon under study, Saldaña (2016) suggested the use of open or initial coding to generate an initial index of codes. In the second cycle of coding, I applied codes from the first cycle across ten interviews to identify and develop emerging themes. This process allowed for further re-organization of codes.

My research sought to understand the experiences of university leaders in the context of COVID-19 and systemic inequity and racism in higher education. Therefore, process coding was an appropriate lens through which to analyze the data (Saldaña, 2016). As an example, there were instances when subjects recounted difficulties navigating their leadership. These data were best examined through process coding. A similar coding analysis was conducted on select qualitative documents, such as public, recorded interviews, media interviews and op-Eds, as well as campus communications. All of the documents and de-identified recorded interviews were included in an Atlas.ti (2022) project for analysis.

Trustworthiness

During qualitative inquiry, it is important to ensure that the focus remains on the participants, their experience, and how they derive meaning from a problem or issue (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Paris & Winn, 2013). Understanding and addressing the role of the researcher in this process is critical to the trustworthiness of the study. Two essential elements to ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative study are reliability and validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Maxwell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), while conducting the research in an ethical manner.

In order to build trustworthiness, I adopted several strategies recognized in qualitative research studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I conducted member checks/respondent validation to ensure that my findings and documentation accurately represented the participants' experiences. Once interviews were transcribed, I shared these with each participant, providing them with the opportunity to review and identify any misinterpretations. Additional support to ensure reliability was provided through triangulation and was achieved through the review of university documents related to leadership decisions and publicly available recorded interviews and panel discussions with participants, which took place between March 2020 and March 2022 (Natow, 2020). The research subjects provided another means of triangulation, through their own descriptions of their colleagues' responses and perspectives during the interviews.

Rich, thick descriptions of the setting and context (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) provided additional validity of the research. Peer debriefing through examination by disinterested parties was utilized as a means of enhancing the accuracy of the study, thereby further building trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Finally, additional discussion with individuals whose profession was in higher education and were unaffiliated with the institution provided an additional objective perspective.

Positionality and Reflexivity

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is a key instrument of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), in that they gather and interpret the information using a protocol developed for this purpose. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate reflection on one's background, culture, and experiences and how these shape the interpretation of the data, the themes that emerge, and the meaning ascribed to the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), acknowledging the influence of the researcher.

My journey in higher education leadership is through administrative rather than academic positions. I am a cis-gender white woman with both an undergraduate and graduate degree in science, and I am in the system, yet also apart from it. While I know all my participants professionally, in some cases, there may be a power dynamic, related to membership within executive leadership. Conversely, opposite power dynamics may manifest when interviewing informal leaders across the institution whose position is perceived as within a different rank than my own. These factors affected my positionality as a colleague and with respect to my position within the university. I am also particularly interested the perspectives of senior leaders as they apply to my own professional journey, which influences my involvement as a participant and observer (Saldaña, 2016) as well as my own bias.

Chavez (2008) described the challenges and demands of insider positionality and provided an approach to mitigate the advantages and liabilities to the researcher. Essential to addressing insider positionality is the researcher's reflection on their own knowledge and familiarity with the site and participants. I was an employee of the university where I conducted this study. My supervisor was a member of the university's leadership, and as a key institutional leader, I interviewed this individual as part of my study. By virtue of my position in the university, I was able to personally invite many the members of the executive leadership team to participate. The selection of the research participants was likely influenced by my own bias through my direct access and connection to senior leaders on a campus as well as knowledge of the positions they occupied (Chavez, 2008). By using analytic memo writing throughout the entire research process, I identified and hopefully mitigated any biases or pre-understanding that I brought to the project as an employee and a colleague within the university.

Researchers wishing to conduct studies in their own institutions have distinct advantages as insiders, including facilitated access and a sense of "preunderstanding" the institution and its organizational politics (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). A process of reflection and critical awareness of any preunderstanding of the research context is essential (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Chavez, 2008). Brannick and Coghlan (2007) emphasized the need for insider researchers to rely on "their experiential and theoretical knowledge to reframe their understanding of situations to which they are close" (p. 72). The demands of both organizational and researcher roles need to be addressed, and constant awareness of the impact of organizational politics on the process of inquiry must also be acknowledged through a process of constant reflection. The use of a peer reviewer who was a colleague at the same institution minimized researcher bias and helped to identify any overlooked or missing themes. A second, disinterested peer reviewer provided an external perspective.

Limitations

The data for this study were collected from a single campus, from interviews conducted with individuals in leadership roles, which suggests that the findings may have a narrow focus as these do not include the perspectives of all campus stakeholders. Faculty and students, key constituencies of the university, were not included in the scope of this study. This should be considered as a possible topic for future inquiry.

Given the visibility of some participants' positions within the university, confidentiality may be limited. This may have resulted in the participants being less forthcoming about the challenges they faced as individual leaders. As many of the subjects were also members of the executive leadership team, there was a possibility of experiencing an "echo chamber" or towing the party line when conducting these "elite" interviews (Natow, 2020). Additionally, by the time

I conducted the interviews, more than two years passed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, it was important to ground participants and frame interview questions around moments in time, such as university closure or re-opening. It is possible that as participants reflected on their experience, they might have forgotten or mis-remembered events and decisions. However, this also presented an opportunity for deeper reflection and probing on the outcomes of decisions.

Finally, the campus under study was a highly resourced institution that was affiliated with a medical system. The direct access to scientific and medical expertise facilitated a robust response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The resources available to the campus allowed it to weather the financial and operational impacts of its response. Many institutions of higher education across the nation faced significant financial hardships as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, hampering their ability to respond effectively to the challenges facing institutions of higher education over the last few years.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings derived from the analysis of semi-structured interviews are presented. The interviews provided insight into the experiences of university leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic and the reckoning of systemic racism and inequity. The results are set in the context of the theoretical frameworks and literature on leadership in higher education. The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership and organizational factors that contributed to a university's response to COVID-19 alongside the reckoning of systemic racism and inequity. The aim was to discover how university leaders understood, reflected upon, and developed their own leadership praxis as they navigated the university's response to the dual crises.

The first research question focuses on leaders as individuals, and how they navigated and reflected upon their own leadership development, their experiences as leaders during this period of disruption, and how these affected their leadership praxis. The second question focuses on the culture of the institution and how it influenced leadership, both individually and as a process. The third question focuses on the extent to which leadership centered equity in the decision-making process. Five themes and related subthemes emerged through the analysis of participant interviews: (1) culture of care; (2) authentic leadership; (3) communication and engagement; (4) innovation, collaboration, and adaptation; and (5) centering equity.

Theme 1: Culture of Care

This theme refers to leaders' consideration of not just health and safety but responding with care for students, faculty, and staff and the need to center those most impacted by access or policy issues. Leaders highlighted their commitment to a culture of care for the campus and the community, expressing the importance of being attentive to the needs of their teams and constituents and the need to empathize with and nurture them. This was described in several

ways, including references to an "ethic of care" or a "duty of care." The university leadership's priority in response to the pandemic was the health and safety of faculty, staff, and students. One participant noted, "safety is obviously the thing that you want to make certain about, you don't want to take a risk with people's health or life. And so, we always prioritized that." At the same time, leaders were experiencing personal crises and difficulties of their own. For many of them, the COVID-19 crisis opened the door to adopt a "human-centered' approach to leadership, which was described by one leader participant,

> It was really caring about all aspects of our work. But mostly caring about human beings and ensuring that we came through this as whole as possible, like not laying off people, not doing salary cuts and all of that kind of stuff. We talked about all the options, but we didn't have to do that, and people's health and well-being, being prioritized. So, the ethic of care showed up really strongly. And, in fact, I hope it is a lesson that we don't soon forget.

Leaders prioritized the needs of their teams and constituents, attesting that to best serve the institution, the people had to come first: "I thought it was really important to prioritize this frame that I have, which is people first, right? You take care of the people so that the people can take care of the mission."

When asked to reflect on key elements of their own leadership journeys, philosophies, priorities, and praxis, university leaders in this study described both individual behaviors and a collective philosophy of leadership rooted in service and care. They suggested that to align human and organizational needs, and function as a resilient organization, you had to care for people, or as noted by one leader,

Leadership is thinking way more about the issues of resilience and the well-being of people, because they play a huge role both in the equation in the ability to execute anything right now, and in what we need to do to as almost a duty of care to our community.

When reflecting on the two years since January 2020 and facing complex challenges, many participants understood that a culture of care was essential to navigating their leadership roles, as illustrated in this reflection,

I can't say before the last two years, we didn't care, but caring and prioritizing health [and] well-being of all populations, that took center stage, because it was the right thing to do, because it was the practical thing to do, it was the legal thing to do. You can't just say, 'Oh, a pandemic is happening, we're going to keep our residence halls open, and our classes.' I know you had to really care about the faculty, you had to care about the students, you had to care about the entire academic enterprise.

With the institution facing several crises, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic, the associated budget uncertainty, and the impacts of national uprisings against racial injustice on the campus community, leaders began promoting a culture of care much more directly and intentionally. This sentiment was captured in this observation: "given the complexity of the situation, for me, the most important priority was giving comfort and confidence to the communities, being the students, the faculty and the staff." Leaders expressed their sense of responsibility for the care and well-being of their colleagues, their teams, and the university community. Three sub-themes, human-centered leadership, leading with compassion and empathy, and recognition and appreciation, are described below and provide additional insight into the complexity of developing a culture of care.

Human-Centered Leadership

Nearly all participants referred to elements of their leadership praxis as the alignment of human and organizational needs through a human resource leadership frame (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Most leaders expressed that they held a "people first" leadership philosophy before the crises emerged and that prioritizing the health and well-being of the university community was a core element of their leadership framework. Putting people's needs at the center of decision-making was uniform among participants, and was well-illustrated by one participant in the following statement,

> You cannot say, 'I care about your safety,' and then be cheap about testing. You cannot say, 'I care about testing,' and not be sensitive to people's different situations. So, you have to care about people first.

The consensus among leaders was that the crises of the last two years reinforced a leadership culture that was human-centered. "Overall, I think it's made me more empathetic and certainly focused on the individuals as well as the collective safety of the institution," one participant noted, reinforcing the notion that institutional practices can reflect care for people and the prioritization of their needs.

There were many references, either explicitly or indirectly, to a servant leadership philosophy and a commitment to the institution, its success, and caring deeply about driving it forward. For example, one leader stated, "I'm here to push the institution forward. And we are all trying to do the same thing. It's not about my ego." Many leaders described caring both for the institution as well as the people within it and connected the success of the institution to human-centered leadership, taking care of the people who work and study there. One interviewee stated, "I should say people, because it's not about staff and faculty and students, it's about taking care

of the people, because it's... We have to, and if we don't, we're going to lose." This sentiment was echoed among all of the participants.

One of the challenges of leadership, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary lockdowns, remote work environments, and other public health policies, was to remain human-centered during a time of great isolation. Many of the leaders in this study reflected on the human connection that was lost, the impact on the community, and their role in fostering human-centeredness. This was further complicated by the competitive and intense culture of a research-oriented university. This institutional culture was described by almost every participant but captured by one leader's comment:

> And the decentralized nature of our institution and the loose coupling feels kind of cold sometimes, so it's hard to say that at once, [in] our pandemic and racial justice response that we prioritized the ethic of care. However, I would say that is true as we found our way through the crisis, but the natural state of the institution, I feel like it's lacking warmth, and I don't think it's... intentionally lacking warmth, it's because we don't pay attention to creating warmth, that we have what I experience as coldness and disconnected-ness.

"Competitive" and a desire for "pre-eminence" were also used to describe the character of the institution. The identity of the campus as a research powerhouse on the cutting edge of innovation reinforced a competitive work culture in which community and relationship building only took place in the context of research collaborations and silos. The interviewees acknowledged that because of this culture, creating a "sense of community" had historically taken a back-seat at the university. At the same time, they recognized that the pandemic provided an opportunity to build community across campus.

Many leaders felt the impact of not being able to connect with their teams and staff in person and developed a range of strategies to create a sense of community and connection. For example, one leader described purchasing lunch and having it delivered to their staff's homes so that the team could eat lunch together during a virtual meeting. Another talked about the need to consider new ways of connecting with people in a remote environment, noting,

> I'm thinking more and more about building a sense of community, maintaining a sense of community and continuity in a way that before the pandemic wasn't as necessary because we were all seeing each other all the time, and we were chit-chatting all the time, and I could build that sense of knowing people and getting them to trust me and getting them to feel like I was their [leader] through all of these different networks of conversation, but when we suddenly become tiny faces on a screen, you have to do that in different ways, and maybe more overtly.

In an institution that historically had not emphasized building community, leaders recognized the COVID-19 and racial uprising crises as opportunies to foster a sense of shared human experience and commonality.

Leading with Compassion and Empathy

Leading with compassion and empathy was a prominent subtheme. Interviewees described their leadership philosophies and frameworks prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and racial uprisings as centered around compassion and empathy; as one leader noted, "I think leadership has to come from the heart in order to really keep everybody on board." Another stated, "Transparency, again, creating a culture that grows and mentors people," further illustrating this viewpoint. In many instances, statements such as these were reflections of deeply engrained leadership philosophies;

I lead with love. That's the kind of leader that I am. And I'm not afraid to say that anymore. So that's my personal development. Because it takes experience and I think a little bit of courage to come forward and say, "This is how I do it." The other thing is some people will try to take advantage of that. Because they think it means that you're not firm. You are sort of easy to get things over on or to deceive. And I don't think that's true. I think it can co-exist where you're a firm, strong leader and you're a loving leader. And so, I'm in a place now where I just say it freely. I lead with love.

The disruptions and crises facing the institution shifted the concept of what it meant to be compassionate and empathetic while in a leadership role. This was reiterated in a number of interviews, and exemplified in this statement,

For us as a leadership team, I think it has allowed us to be more attentive to the fears, challenges, concerns that our students as well as our team members and colleagues, particularly those who are caregivers, to parents or children, or both, much of which we saw during the course of the pandemic. And in doing so, we and myself included can be more responsive in our work together, and more intentional about reducing some of the barriers to academic and professional success, and to well-being so really understanding the critical importance of empathy and compassion.

Ultimately, it came down to thinking about the health and well-being of an anxious campus community looking for guidance and leadership. Leaders spoke of ways in which that was manifested, and one in particular said,

Of course, there were definitely periods of time where we were just in crisis management mode, you know, that first hundred days really. And I think that there's that decision making process also being a little bit more inclusive, and maybe a bit more gentle. Now,

where it's like, well, we only have three facts, and we had a lot of people who are really

anxious and concerned, what decision can we make? That's also compassionate.

In addition to expressing a human-centered leadership praxis, participants strongly

expressed that the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial uprisings created a pressurized

environment in which they either chose to or were driven to expressing their vulnerabilities,

frustrations, and stressors in a way that they felt had not been the norm in the workplace before.

Participants framed this as their responsibility as leaders in caring for employees and their well-

being,

> I'm going to show up as human, and I think, to some people, that was a gift and gave
>
> them permission to see that we are also deeply impacted about this as well, not just as
>
> individuals, but also how much we care about their well-being.

Leaders engaged in an iterative decision-making process in response to constantly shifting

guidance and information, balancing the need of the campus community to have trust in them, to

feel that their safety and well-being were prioritized.

Recognition and Appreciation

An important element described by leaders was the connection to faculty and staff and

recognition of the immense contributions they were making in navigating the crises. There was

an acknowledgement by many of the leaders participating in this study that staff were often

unrecognized in an institution that is inherently faculty-centered and becoming more student-

centered,

> I mean, to be very candid, this place has a huge respect for faculty because of the
>
> caliber of the folks that we have in the academy and the way [this institution] was
>
> founded. I think [leadership] brought much-deserved focus on students [many]

years ago, and staff has been missing non-stop in this equation until very, very recently and even today, we still have some ways to go.

There appeared to be two subthemes to the reflections. One was deep appreciation for their teams and staff, whom they got to know in a different context,

Another aspect was learning about the roles of people at the next two levels down in the university. And it wasn't that I didn't mentally appreciate, I just didn't know how fantastic they were, and the skills that they had. And so, I think that it really led me to think more about the skills of the level of the people who report to my senior staff, and how important the investment in those skills is.

Leaders recognized how their own positionality and power dynamics might have obscured their ability to form deeper connections with staff, noting that "it was a mistake to feel so constrained by that" prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The other subtheme was recognition. In their reflections on the last two years, nearly all expressed gratitude for the work of frontline and "essential" workers, many of whom continued to support the 24/7 operation of the university. One participant noted, "our folks were on site every day, all day around the clock, and often, not even often, they're not noticed." When asked if there was anything they would have done differently, the answers centered around stronger acknowledgement and recognition of the staff, as noted by one leader, "I would have made space for more celebration of the staff," as a way of acknowledging their contributions and dedication. This sentiment was often repeated during the interviews.

While there were many references to acknowledging staff, leaders also recognized the extraordinary effort undertaken by faculty to rapidly pivot to remote instruction, noting the dedication to preserving the educational mission of the university by "prioritize[ing] educating

our students." One leader indicated their respect for the "People [who] just said, 'Don't know how I'm going to do it, but I'm going to get it done,' and they taught all the classes." However, there was also an acknowledgment that faculty, particularly those with young children or caregiving responsibilities, had not felt a sufficient level of support or recognition for the immense challenges they had faced. One leader noted, "The thing I [heard] most here is that we really let our faculty with small children down, we had no options for them, for taking care of their children".

Theme 2: Authentic Leadership

The second theme emerged through leaders' reflections on how the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way in which they led their teams. Many threw out hierarchical convention and rethought the ways they could show up as a leader. Northouse (2022) described one of the characteristics of authentic leaders as being aware and transparent about who they are. Included in this theme of authentic leadership are two subthemes centered on gender and identity.

Many leaders in this study expressed that showing up as "human" had a positive impact on their teams and the constituents they supported. They described authentic leadership behaviors such as self-awareness, reflection, a strong moral compass, and a willingness to share their lived experience with subordinates, with one leader noting, "folks want to see you present who you are as a person as a leader, and I've been working to embrace that more". When asked about the philosophies and principles that guided their leadership work, one participant reflected,

> I thought the most important thing to do was to lead by example. And by doing the same things that they were doing, I understood what their challenges were. And they also knew that I understood their challenges and wasn't just sitting up on an exalted pillow, telling them what to do. And that made it possible when they felt stressed to come to me and

say, 'How would you approach this?' because they knew that I'd approached the same problem in my own experience.

Another leader, when prompted with a question about their leadership philosophy, referred to an ethos of leadership that was centered on teamwork and the interpersonal dynamic between leaders and followers in which they co-created the leadership space, which is another core tenet of authentic leadership (Northouse, 2022). They said,

You should be able to answer the question, "Why should anyone follow me?" and "If you want to go fast, you go alone and if you want to go far, you go together." It's an old African proverb. And those two things really, they anchor just about everything I do.

Every participant referenced transparency as central to their leadership praxis: "I feel like there's nothing to hide, we are all working towards the same mission, and I felt like the staff would feel more connected to the place if they knew exactly what the mission was." While creating a sense of professional unity and human connection was described as an important value, there was also "external pressure for us to change the approach we were taking to making decisions and to, as like people kept saying, be transparent." As a result, increased transparency opened the door to more robust collaboration and communication.

Gendered Perspectives

Leaders who identified as women referenced that for them, leadership behaviors, such as empathy, compassion, and showing care, were discouraged prior to the pandemic, that these were seen as "weakness" so that, in order to navigate their leadership spaces, these characteristics were not previously expressed. However, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the conversation,

As a leader who identifies as a woman, I've always been keenly aware of the perception

that showing gratitude, care and empathy for others can be perceived by those with a

more patriarchal style to be considered a weakness. But during this crisis, I've learned to

disregard the sexist view, and instead embrace this quality in myself and to amplify it…to

extend empathy and compassion to others. And I've noticed that doing so it frees others

to more easily share their fears, their concerns and challenges.

Women leaders expressed that during these crises, they were able to show up as their

whole selves in their leadership spaces, which was something that they had not been culturally or

professionally socialized to do. They embraced their own emotional vulnerabilities and anxieties.

One participant who identified as a woman said,

I have become more vulnerable with those folks that I work with. Not because I desire it,

personally, but because of what I see it does for others. And that has made the people

who I work with, particularly on my team, I have seen them, just exhale, because they

weren't having to present to me in a perfect way, when clearly things were totally falling

apart for them. For all of us in some regard. And so, I see, okay, well, when I do that, it

creates a different kind of environment for folks. And that is good for students. And that's

good for my team.

Another leader expressed, "unless you can let people know you as a person, and know some of

your frailties, they can't trust you, because they feel as though you're hiding from them, and if

you're hiding from them, they can't trust you." Building and maintaining trust was frequently

mentioned, both explicitly and through the use of terms such as "transparency" and

"accountability," as well as through ensuring the dissemination of a broad, consistent message.

For most of the interview questions, there were some gender differences in the responses. Leaders who identified as women were more likely to use "I" statements, describing their own feelings and vulnerability as well as of those they served. Leaders who identified as men described a greater awareness and sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of others, while not specifically expressing an increased sense of their own vulnerability. As a result of their experience over the last two years, they were more likely to reference a greater sense of empathy and care for their teams, a greater understanding of peoples' struggles and circumstances: "I think it actually also… helped me develop a better understanding of my staff in terms of dealing with people and understanding people, being more empathetic, being more sympathetic." Leaders who identified as men seemed to use words like "transparency" and "accountability" to express the responsibility they felt for their teams and the community. For these participants, care was expressed as a duty.

Identity Matters

There were many references to identity, either directly or indirectly, throughout the interviews. Participants in this study came from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, and gender was evenly represented. Although it was beyond the scope of this study to dive more deeply into these demographics, there were differences in how individuals responded to questions about how the crises of the last two years impacted their leadership. Responding to the question, "What has changed for you as a leader since January 2020?", one leader captured the essence of what many expressed,

> I feel like everything [changed], and not all in a bad way, but it was just another reminder
> of how your identity as a leader matters and how you are situated in the unfortunate
> human hierarchy, if you are a man, if you're a woman, if you're a person of color, if

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you're a disabled person, how you experienced the uprising and the pandemic, and how

you are situated as a leader and as a human being in the… In our socialized world, in our

racialized world. Everybody had an impact that was individualized and also collective as

a people.

Leaders of color who self-identified during the interview process referenced the

intersectionality of race, gender, and/or position within the university. These leaders described

their experiences over the last two years as marked not only by the stressors of the pandemic but

also by personal impacts of systemic racism in American society, as epitomized by the murders

of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and many other Black Americans as well as the over-policing

of family members and their communities, health disparities, and systemic inequity. One

interviewee stated,

> I get emotional when I think about the last two years. And I'm not sure I can answer that
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> question clear-eyed, because I feel like I'm still coming... I'm just still processing a lot. So
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> not only did the pandemic impact me and my family like everybody else, right? So, like
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> everybody else, it was scary, it was shocking, it was... Just all the things, but being a
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> leader during that time and being expected to put other people, my team members at ease,
>
> that takes a special kind of resolve, like, how do you show up for people when the rug has
>
> been pulled out from you as well?

Leaders' intersectional identities came to the forefront while responding to the

COVID-19 pandemic, and at the same time, some were personally impacted by the

reckoning of racial injustice across the nation. As institutional leaders, they navigated

their own personal traumas and still showed up in their leadership roles to guide their

teams; as one said, "I couldn't answer…. without situating myself as a gendered, raced

person, showing up as a leader in this environment." This reflected the situations many leaders in which found themselves: dealing with personal trauma while still having to show up as a leader to provide care, guidance, and assurance to the campus community.

Theme 3: Communication and Engagement

This theme refers to the importance of inclusive, transparent, and broad communication, as well as engagement with stakeholders, while leading. Leaders reflected on how the need for crisis communication in response to COVID-19 highlighted how little they had been communicating previously. Many learned that using multiple modalities, frequent messaging, and including access to leadership yielded positive results. Communication not only kept their constituents informed but also kept them connected. Three sub-themes emerged and are described below: accessibility and transparency, consistent message and multiple modalities, and building community and collaboration.

Accessibility and Transparency

Transparency and accountability were highlighted because the leaders at the top of the institution were accessible and used multiple modalities to communicate with the campus community by, for example, "adding things like the town halls, where people could ask questions and get their questions answered so they felt that they had an ability to really communicate with leadership and not just listen to what was being sent to them." These activities were augmented by a constant flow of information presented through daily dashboards and frequent campus communications regarding new guidance and how the campus was responding. One leader said these activities were

driven by as many facts as we could gather, to solve whatever problem was at hand. And sometimes we didn't have very many facts. But we would say, hey, we have these three facts. And so, this is what we think we can do today.

On an individual level, leaders in this study connected with members of the campus community on a regular basis. One leader felt strongly that anyone with a thought or good idea should be able to reach them without having to navigate a hierarchy so that innovation would not get stuck in the chain of command. This illustrates the dynamic between the need for accessibility and easy flow of ideas with the hierarchical nature of educational institutions.

Almost all participants reflected on the importance of transparency to their own leadership style and the value of leveraging data and science as an institutional value. When asked about institutional leadership principles, one leader said,

transparency, accountability is the second one. Whether it's EDI [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion], whether it's COVID, taking ownership of the issues in a way that was, I think, very candid. The good, the bad and the ugly and kind of owning it and acting on it. I think that has been very defining as well.

Initially, transparency was not adopted without hesitation or concern and with an initial level of discomfort. As they reflected on their experiences, however, these values were considered invaluable to the overall success of the institution in managing the COVID-19 pandemic,

I would be more reticent to do that, [they] really pushed me to be more transparent…Now we're updating our daily [data] dashboard, we're going to modify and start pushing that out, so people have a better sense of what's happening every day, I think that [helps] with engagement, it helps with transparency.

In large, complex institutions, balancing communication, transparency, and the need to make quick decisions in light of evolving data, scientific, and medical guidance presents a challenge.

Consistent Message, Multiple Modalities

Every leader interviewed reflected on the importance of communication. Participants stated that while they had always known that communication was an important element of their leadership, they now felt a new awareness of how deficient they had been previously. As one participant explained, the situation was

> An incredible learning experience about, especially about communication and the amount of communication I do now compared to the amount that I did before is an order of magnitude more. And I just learned by the example of dealing with COVID, what I should have been doing more of all along.

Prior to the crises of the last two years, participants suggested that the mechanisms, frequency, and depth of communication were likely inadequate; although, they were not necessarily aware of this at the time. Several leaders described how that has changed, which was perfectly captured by one leaders' comment,

> the level of communication engagement that we have today is vastly different from what we had two or three years ago. If you think of, you know, the town halls, various stakeholder groups, if you think of the weekly emails or newsletters... We have really gone from 0 to 60 miles an hour. I'm not sure we're quite there yet, but it's a vast change.

Leaders adopted multi-pronged approaches to communication, leveraging new technology to engage broader audiences but also re-thinking and configuring existing communication channels such as websites and newsletters.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the heavy flow of changing guidelines and safety measures, the frequency of communication necessarily had to increase, and with it, there was greater engagement between leaders of different parts of the university. This situation was emphasized in a collective impact and shared leadership approach of holding inclusive meetings in which many voices were present at the table:

> I have become a leader that embraces a flatter organization. And, you know, that just means that there are 65 people in a meeting, where you probably really only need 10, in terms of decision-making authority, but the expertise of those other 55 people, you know, informed the decisions in a way that was much more efficient.

This kept the flow of information short and rapid. In response to an evolving health crisis, this open communication style allowed for rapid, data-informed decisive action, supporting adaptation to new circumstances. As noted by one leader, "I think some of [our communication] was intentional, but I think a lot of it was intuitive… but whatever it was, I think it helped create a little bit more comfort, because there was more transparency around decision-making." The inclusion of many voices at the table, along with a consistent flow of information, reinforced a sense of "being in this together," of connection and community.

Building Community and Collaboration

Leaders felt that the increased communication contributed to a sense of community, engagement, and belonging on the part of campus stakeholders. The intentionality and thought that went into creating messages, creating access to members of the executive leadership team, medical experts, and other leaders kept the communication loop close and short, increasing transparency and visibility into decision-making, which was captured in this statement from one participant,

Thinking back about the past two years, I think that one of the things that really struck

home for me was the importance of multi-directional communication. In order to make

one's leadership centered on equity. We started a lot of new practices of having not only

newsletters, but town halls with participation by people from all over campus, we had

much more multi-dimensional leadership group meetings on a regular basis to bring in

many more voices and having a wider range of communication and listening as a central

part of the communication model. What not just doing the speaking [did], [was] allowed

us to think about the perspectives that weren't necessarily represented on the [leadership

team] or weren't necessarily represented in a small group of experts, and think about what

everybody on campus might need to succeed in this time.

This was also critical to the institution's success and created a need for broad engagement across

the campus, including students, whose voices many leaders described an integral to the

university's response, as noted by one leader,

inviting students into the larger meetings, some people were not excited about that...

Because sometimes there are things you want to talk about, and decisions you want to

percolate on, think about before it gets out to the students. But inviting them into these

strategy conversations, that was a really inclusive approach and really important, and I

think that helped our success.

The intentional inclusion of student leaders at the table was seen as a welcome departure

from the norm, possibly precipitated by both the events around racial reckoning and the COVID

pandemic, when a more human-centered approach was seen as essential.

Many of the leaders in this study adopted a shared leadership or developmental approach

and provided leadership opportunities for others who may not have had these opportunities

otherwise, "feeling empowered to just kind of speak up and contribute and make the product better. And I think that has been one of the very positive developments." One leader described the ways in which the crises created opportunities for this participation,

> So just really opening up the privilege of decision-making for a great campus like ours, it just made our whole response better and the ways that other people got seen and got tapped to help lead, I certainly hope that we will remember that center of excellence and remember who we can call on for a particular effort.

The leadership could have adopted a top-down approach, which may have seemed more efficient. Adopting an inclusive and consultative approach led to a more successful outcome.

Theme 4: Innovation, Collaboration and Adaptation

The fourth theme that emerged refers to the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the culture of academic interdisciplinarity that campus leaders described as one of the founding principles of the university. The result was broad collaboration and adaptation across administrative and academic units, collective action, and common goals to eliminate silos that participants described as endemic to the campus. This theme captures the leaders' reflections on the innovative culture of the campus, driven by interdisciplinarity, expertise, agility, and a practice of making iterative decisions based on new data, information, and scientific discovery. Three sub-themes also emerged and provide a nuanced interpretation: diverse perspectives, breaking down silos, empowering inclusive teams and sharing, synthesizing, and integrating. Leaders often referred to the wealth of expertise on the campus, but at the same time, recognized that the expertise also manifested from all levels of the institution. Leaders expressed optimism about how they could apply what they learned about collaboration, collective impact, and shared vision. Higher education is not known for swift and rapid responses, and there was a sense of

realization that when needed, the institution could be flexible, adaptive, and quick to respond, or as one participant put it,

> I think one of the most important lessons learned is that when we really need to, we can be very innovative and flexible, and amazing. And then if we really applied this same urgency to other institutional needs, we would be a very different kind of university.

> The campus was consistently described as "young," "agile," "innovative," "competitive," and "decentralized." A place where expertise and intellect were highly prized. Many described the institutional culture as innovative and willing to take risks to leverage the expertise and intellectual heft that was present on campus. "Innovative" and "adaptive" were two of the most frequently used words to describe the institution, reflecting what Begquist and Pawlak (2008) called a collegial academic culture where intellect, expertise, and pre-eminence are highly valued. In fact, many described the campus as being very interdisciplinary in its approach to research and that this is part of the ethos of the campus. The interdisciplinary nature of the research and scholarly enterprise created a condition during the pandemic where faculty expertise and innovation could be leveraged to solve complex problems, lending itself to a collective impact approach. One participant explained this process,

> I hope we see longer term impacts in terms of enhancing multi-disciplinarity because I think a lot of the value added came from bringing different perspectives to the table. And that's not just academic disciplines, its people's work experience, and having the opportunity to think about how to efficiently run campus operations, and giving people the flexibility to do that, using their own insights into their own jobs.

This approach was described as creating a sense of ownership and confidence in the decisions being made by the university. Another leader noted,

that made it more possible for us to make decisions, recommendations with more

precision, and to feel better about what the outcomes would be. So, we were both

learning about the characteristics of the virus and its transmission. At the same time, we

were making decisions, recommendations about how to operate the campus.

The leaders in this study referred to themselves as being "data-driven" and leaning

toward making decisions based on the most information available. While this may have been a

previous practice, it emerged much more strongly during the COVID-19 pandemic response. By

leveraging campus expertise, whether the faculty, staff, or student, these voices were invited into

the discussion much more intentionally so that better decisions could be made. One participant

stated,

> at the more senior level, I think that we try to have a discussion with the subject matter
>
> experts in the room, as well as the people who are either making the decision or giving
>
> advice to the decision maker and trying to make sure that we see the data, we interrogate
>
> the experts about the data so we actually understand the data and its implications.

This process allowed leaders to better explain the decision-making process to the campus

community as having been informed by experts, thereby increasing transparency, trust, and

confidence.

Diverse Perspectives

As mentioned previously in the third theme of "Communication and Engagement," most

of the leaders interviewed reflected on the importance of communication and understanding how

much it had improved out of necessity during the last two years. Communication was connected

to engagement, which was also identified as critical to effective and meaningful leadership. As

expressed by one leader, "I would just say one of the most important things that I learned from

this period is the value and the benefit of allowing many voices to inform decision making."
Gathering diverse perspectives required leaders revisit who needed to be included in discussions
to offer another perspective, which ensured informed decision-making and alignment with shared
goals and desired outcomes. As one participant said, "maybe the biggest lesson was this idea of
engagement. And I think the structure is to support it, to have dialogues on important issues or
initiatives." The need to respond to a rapidly evolving health crisis required a diversity of
thought and perspective:

> I think by having people together in these rooms and these electronic rooms, where ideas
> come from a lot of different places, there's less of this sense that all of the good ideas are
> coming from people who are in positions of authority.

> There was a strong sense that the leadership culture on campus continues to evolve and
adapt, as captured in one participant's reflection, "I think the leadership culture, the evolution of
it has been very healthy in the last couple of years, in terms of respecting people more for their
contributions and expertise than the titles they have under their signature block." Some of this
was attributed to changes in leadership but also to the openness of the campus to adaptation in
the face of new data or information. In their assessment of the leadership culture, one leader
described the sense of ownership and validation that emerged through being included in
decision-making,

> I just keep going back to participative leadership, and I think... I don't even know if
> [they] did this on purpose, but I think there was a real sense of validation and people
> feeling like their opinions mattered because you could see that it was taken into
> consideration in the ultimate decision.

Leaders described how not only did this approach create a sense of connection and investment, but it may have forever changed the way complex issues are discussed, and ultimately tackled, on campus.

Breaking Down Silos

The university is decentralized, highly innovative, and historically operated in deep silos: "When I first got here, it was shocking how siloed everything was, people just didn't talk to each other." This culture was partly also attributed to the competitive character of the campus. One leader explained, "I think the highly competitive nature of the institution, it sometimes makes it hard for people to come out of their silos to be in community." This sentiment was echoed by many participants.

However, leaders also described the university as evolving as a "matrixed" organization where interdisciplinary work was not just common but encouraged, and that this was relatively recent; "I would say, that we're in the process of changing from very siloed to much more matrixed." On the academic side, there was a history of interdisciplinary research and collaboration, making the campus "a place that thrive[d] on new ideas and that value[d] interdisciplinary collaborations," which was enhanced during the pandemic. However, the siloed and decentralized nature of the institution was mentioned in almost every interview. Participants acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic had broken down many barriers to collaboration. One leader referenced a moment when they felt that they saw a shift toward breaking silos and enhancing collaboration. Faculty from different schools leveraged an opportunity to advance diversity through an interdisciplinary proposal, which was seen as an example of the spirit of collaboration and felt like a catalyst for change, a willingness to work together for greater goals. They stated that "anything that we can do to build the success of our faculty from traditionally

marginalized groups is really important for us as an institution." The value placed on this perspective was not insignificant, and there was a strong indication that these new connections will continue beyond the pandemic:

> We can do this kind of thing. And I hope as bigger, different types of challenges arise, we'll realize the value of those interdisciplinary voices and structures to keep everybody aware of what's happening, etcetera. The other thing is that we are the kind of place that isn't afraid to step out and innovate. While everybody else went home, we said, "Come on back."

Breaking down silos and the willingness to partner and work together extended beyond academic disciplines, reaching the administrative units of the university, "I think the evolution for me and for all of us has been to just completely move past our own portfolios to take a team problem solving approach, that has been highly cross functional." These collaborative efforts allowed for much more agile decision-making that was rooted in science and data. Leveraging the expertise among the faculty and calling experts into the room regardless of their position in the institution reflected the breakdown of silos and the shared leadership approach that evolved over the last two years. Several participants expressed the hope that the university would be able to continue to leverage this approach, and this sentiment was perfectly captured in the following statement:

> I think this kind of interdisciplinary approach, we've had to take to this epidemic, this pandemic has helped with that because it's forced people to be in the same room and start listening to each other. And I hope that we can continue that moving forward.

The silos of administration and faculty are well-known in higher education, and "breaking silos" is a theme that emerged in describing how the faculty and the administration partnered and collaborated. As one interviewee noted,

> what [the faculty] really appreciated most was this was the first time they really thought the administration was actually listening to the faculty. And they hoped that would continue after this pandemic was over in other areas that were important to faculty, and I thought that was an interesting observation.

The breaking of silos increased transparency, and communication created a space for stronger collaboration and shared leadership. It also reinforced a sense of shared governance between the faculty and the administration.

Empowering Inclusive Teams

The flattened organizational structure that brought more voices to the decision-making process also improved transparency, as the campus community could ask leaders directly about decisions that were made. The collective approach to solving complex problems meant that leaders were able to refer to how decisions were made and what factors were considered in that process (Kania & Kramer, 2011). It was not a "top-down" exercise. As one participant explained,

> Whether it's the academic research context or even the operational context, we're very good at bringing teams together to solve issues. And I think we're doing that more and more. There is very positive interdependence here in the [leadership], but it translates at multiple levels below, which is great.

At the same time, just as in most large organizations, there is a hierarchy, and ultimately, there are final decision-makers. However, during these crises there was a tendency to leverage the expertise of the campus in collaborative ways to tackle complex problems and issues.

Participants frequently referred to the importance of their teams and talked about their commitments to building a culture of inclusion and participation in which team members felt supported and engaged. Some had inherited teams, others built their own over time, yet all expressed how important it was to empower teams to do the work they need to do. They indicated the need to not micro-manage, maintaining high expectations for quality and allowing for growth and autonomy. One leader noted,

> I have a great team, everybody is enabled, and everybody is able to do, hopefully push to their potential, and they have opportunities to really grow, they make mistakes, I make mistakes, we own them and we move on... This isn't a culture that has people feeling like if they did something that didn't work out well, that their jobs are at risk, or... We just don't have that kind of environment. And I think everyone's really aligned around the vision.

The following quote captures the essence of most responses: "I find good people and then get out of their way. I don't have time or interest in micromanaging. I have incredibly high expectations. I'm very honest and committed to supporting the growth and development of people around me." Every leader participant specifically referred to building good teams and "getting out of their way" as the means to achieve institutional goals.

Participants also expressed a commitment to building community and connection with their teams through an empowering and supportive frame; "I just think it's important that people feel like they're going to be supported as individuals and members of the team, and they can take some risks and try to do some great things." This included finding opportunities for deeper relationships by creating a space for leaders and their teams to be in community, or as one participant said, "And I think that really helped people connect with me and feel as though they

had that opening, I'd opened the door." One leader described how they effected change through collective action and inclusive decision-making, connecting the institutional mission and a sense of purpose, noting,

> a philosophy of fostering collective impact, trying to help people work together in structured and meaningful ways that give them a sense of ownership and autonomy over what they're doing, but help them collaborate so that there is a larger and more demonstrable impact of what they are doing.

> Others emphasized problem solving through consensus and an emphasis on listening to other perspectives: "You have to be able to listen to people and listen to other voices and potentially pivot to make things happen, even if it's not your idea." This ties back to a collective desire to move the institution forward or be "very cross-functional in the way we rely on each other's expertise very, very openly. So, there's been a very sophisticated, I think, role-based kind of team approach."

> The overall sentiment among leaders was that decisions and outcomes were greatly improved when a variety of perspectives and voices were included in university decisions, as note here by one leader,

> I think it's something that came out of this that I hope stays. It's very easy for, to use an overused term, the boss to tell people what to do. But it's much more efficient for the boss to say, how do you think you could do your job better and more easily and what things get in the way of having it done, the way you think it should be done, and we had to do a lot of that during this outbreak. And I hope that kind of thinking doesn't go away. As we go back to more normal operations, whatever they are, because I think they helped us

immensely in approaching this in a way that was more effective than if we had to do in a

top-down way.

The expressed hope was that this approach would continue beyond the COVID-19 pandemic as

the university continues to face complex and thorny challenges.

Sharing, Synthesizing, and Integrating

Leaders described practicing a style of leadership in which many voices were at the table,

which might not have been as prevalent prior to the pandemic. One leader expressed how they

felt less inclined to "honor the hierarchy" in the same way as they had before the pandemic. With

the use of virtual meeting spaces, meeting groups became quite large and diverse, representing

different parts of the institution, and seemed to grow as time went on and when new voices or

expertise was needed. Leaders expressed that these types of engaging and inclusive meeting

practices should continue.

This institution was a research-focused institution that considered its faculty among the

best in their fields. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an expressed desire to include

experts in discussions, to examine large volumes of data from many sources, and share broadly

across the campus. Wherever the expertise lay, those individuals were brought into the

discussion:

> …at the more senior level, I think that we try to have a discussion with the subject matter
>
> experts in the room, as well as the people who are either making the decision or giving
>
> advice to the decision maker and trying to make sure that we see the data, we interrogate
>
> the experts about the data so we actually understand the data and its implications.

Leaders expressed that they saw their role as "synthesizers" or "integrators," connecting ideas,

thoughts, and practices to leverage their position in the university to invite more voices to the

discussion as needed. In large virtual meetings with many participants, there were opportunities for individuals to bring forward ideas that would otherwise have been over-looked; for example, leaders would tell others, "oh, that's a good idea, invite them to the next [leadership] meeting." One leader described how they saw their role as an "integrator" as follows,

I build bridges between different parts of the enterprise and make sure I'm aware of the details, but I try to step back and see how it all fits together because that's something that I'm more in a position to do than somebody who's only working in the one area. So that's sort of synthetic and constructing a vision based on the information from below rather than just an abstract vision. I would say that at the abstract level, equity, diversity, and inclusion has to run through everything that we do, and that principle of collective impact of honesty and building trust, [that's] just really important.

Another important element of the leadership process was the shortened communication loop between different stakeholders, resulting in an ability to respond to new data and information very quickly, taking advantage of the innovative culture of the institution. This loop created an atmosphere of quick, decisive problem solving and action, as noted by one leader when considering the responses from peer institutions,

A lot of my counterparts or other institutions that I interacted with were calling about how we were doing various things, expressed that they couldn't get the campus to do anything just because they didn't know who to talk to about what needed to be done, and by having a relatively short loop between people who could get things done and the people who could authorize getting them done and the people who are thinking about what should be done, we could make decisions in a faster way.

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This communication practice allowed for quick decision-making and pivoting to a new orientation, dependent on scientific and medical guidance, and responding to new data in a constantly evolving situation.

Theme 5: Centering Equity

This theme represents the collective commitment expressed by leaders in this study to centering equity, inclusion, and justice in their leadership work. There were several ways in which these concepts were described, from addressing policing on campus to thinking about ways in which equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice needed to be explicit in all of the work of the university. This concept is captured in the sub-themes that emerged: listening, talking and awareness, institutional commitment to centering equity, and personal journeys toward critical consciousness.

The health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated what was possible for the university in terms of being able to tackle complex challenges. A common reflection from leaders was that the pandemic,

> was an opportunity for us to use the moment to transform our system to take advantage of the opportunity to advance conversations about equity, diversity, and inclusion, and to be very strategic about addressing issues of equity and health, and in all other areas of higher education.

A core tenant of shared equity leadership as a broadly inclusive and collaborative approach to achieve equitable outcomes is that "equity-mindedness" and a personal journey to critical consciousness are essential (Kezar et al., 2021). Most leaders interviewed for this study expressed a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, with demonstrated professional accomplishments in support of advancing this work. Even those considered leaders in this space

described learning moments and realizations in these last two years that led them to see equity and inequity through a new lens. Many indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic shed light on already existing inequity in under-represented or marginalized populations, from educational support to health disparities. As one participant noted,

> That's the kind of structure we built, but very much with EDI completely infused. We were always respecting the different units, we're going to be responsible for different things, but everybody has to collaborate and be in the same decision-making space together, and at every point the questions were asked, "How is this going to impact the most vulnerable, the most underserved with everything, wearing masks, having things in person, all of it.

Leaders reflected on the university's success and considered the lessons learned during COVID-19, the new approaches, relationships, and practices developed, and wondered,

> I told [them] we were so successful with COVID. I said, you have built a culture of cooperation amongst the first three levels of the administration of the university. We're all in tune. We all know each other; we all trust each other. What problem are you going to take on now to take advantage of this? And I said, I think it ought to be EDI.

The equity-centered approach was not created overnight. There was an existing praxis and prioritization built into the university's strategic plan, and this laid the foundation for how the university could respond to both the health crisis and the reckoning of systemic racism and inequity.

Listening, Talking, and Awareness

During the pandemic, every university campus in America was confronted with a reckoning of systemic inequity and racism. National uprisings were witnessed across the country.

Issues of racial inequity and disparity came forward in this institution as well. Many leaders in this study shared the perspective that the COVID crisis highlighted existing inequities both on campus and in society. They also expressed that the disruption and the concurrent reckoning and uprising against racial injustice created a space and openness to talk about race and difficult topics. As noted by one leader,

> I think it [the reckoning] provided a context in which it became more possible to talk more openly about those issues, which I've cared deeply about and worked on over a long time. And there was a greater shared sense of urgency, and it made a context where we could just talk more about it, do more about it.

One key aspect of the leaders' disposition on this topic was to use the opportunity to engage in difficult conversations, to leverage the opportunity to learn, to listen, and to become aware of the lived experiences of those who were part of marginalized communities. One way was to engage in direct conversations with constituents who were most impacted,

> We started having some periodic conversations with senior Black faculty and senior Black staff and we learned some really interesting things from those that we've been trying to put into practice. Just hearing about people's experiences and thoughts and perceptions and we've been able to act on some of the things that they brought up.

One leader commented on those conversations further and described the way in which they thought these would stay at the forefront, noting that

> One of the most important aspects of the racial uprising in the country was that we had to talk about it, and we had to talk about things that were really scary, like naming the word race in conversations with people you didn't know very well. Once you talk about it, then it can keep coming up in conversation and you can keep your focus on this. So, if we

keep talking about it, we can keep reminding each other to pay attention to this

dimension, and then we can sustain it.

Many leaders referenced their intention to leverage the current opening to engage in complex and

difficult conversations to effect change toward a more equitable and inclusive institution.

Institutional Commitment to Centering Equity

When confronting and addressing systemic inequity, the campus leaders interviewed

wanted to ensure that the campus was doing more than just checking a box. One leader expressed

that in these last two years: "I think inclusion has become much more of a core tenant of

everything that we do, while before, it was yet another thing that we had to care about, if it

makes any sense." One leader felt that the university's response was appropriate, noting,

> I think we were always quite fast at public expressions of concern when things happened,
>
> rather than kind of waiting to have things percolate out from other places. And I think
>
> that helped, it showed that the leadership was paying attention and continued to do so. I
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> think that by having pockets of leadership around diversity that are recognized as being
>
> important on campus at appropriate levels, and with access to the appropriate people, the
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> institution's also put its money where its mouth is in terms of having people here to
>
> advocate for a more inclusive institution.

However, several leaders also expressed that while the uprisings protesting systemic

racism opened the door for authentic and candid discussions, they also witnessed an "explosion

of [Chief Diversity Officer] positions across higher education" in response to the fact that "in

higher education, people's eyes were opened to racial injustice and inequality and health

disparities and inequality." The concern, noted by one leader was that "many of them were set up

kind of because it was the right thing to do, like making a statement." Ultimately, there needs to be sustainable, responsive infrastructure to effect change, or as one participant noted,

> People were doing statements, but where's the substance there? And where's the sustainability of that? So, it has the potential to create lasting change, and my hope for the incumbents in these new positions is that they create structures and systems to make sure it lasts and that we're not just having a moment.

Campus leaders were committed to the long-term effort to dismantling inequitable systems within the university by ensuring that the work was real, that the staff doing the work were empowered, that metrics were developed and utilized to keep the institution accountable.

Some leaders suggested that another essential piece to dismantling inequitable and racist structures is to agree to what the problems are. "It goes back to kind of understanding what the problems are, and I don't think that we have alignment there," one said, indicating that there was a lack of clarity within and among leadership teams. There was a sense that resistance remained: "George Floyd's murder has yet to be adjudicated, Breonna Taylor has died, Ahmaud Arbery… I mean this... No one wanted to talk about us being a place where those things don't get swept under the rug." The responses demonstrated that the campus perhaps is not completely in alignment about the importance of this work and addressing and dismantling systemic racism and inequity will be a long-term effort requiring endemic change:

> I think it really speaks to the systems problems, and I know it makes people uncomfortable, some people uncomfortable, but I think we have to be really active about making decisions, driving frameworks, and we're doing our anti-racism work the same way we do everything here, which is we drive through daily engagement systems, we drive through project management … And it puts it into operation a predictable process

that people become habituated to, including all the decision-making ... I think that's

[how] you make change... institutionally.

Many leaders referenced that being in alignment is an important aspect to effecting change, both in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to addressing inequity within the organization. In particular, the alignment of leadership in understanding what the problems are, as well as alignment around long term goals and possible solutions, is essential to progress.

Personal Journeys Toward Critical Consciousness: Confronting Racism and Inequity

While most participants directly expressed a commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and justice, many leaders described moments that illuminated their equity leadership journey, revealing blind spots, or re-affirming the opportunity they saw in the disruption to advance an equity-focused agenda: "I don't always anchor [issues] under a racism lens, but, ultimately, it all serves that purpose of being anti-racist and more just." One leader commented on how the uprising and reckoning of racial injustice in 2020 opened a door to being able to talk more openly about racism and inequity,

And so that means that we have to change the culture and we have to change the

upholstery around diversity in order to be successful with diversity. And that's what I

learned. And it wasn't that I wasn't concerned about it. I just, you know, I couldn't see it

as starkly as I do now.

Several participants shared this sentiment, that the Black Lives Matter movement, protests, and uprising around the nation catalyzed deeper conversations on campus. One participant said, "I think did make a huge impact on people's willingness to say enough is enough, we have to do things differently. We just have to do things differently."

Part of the personal journey included a deeper understanding of one's own complacency or ignorance about issues around race and inequity, as noted here,

> I don't know how to lead because I don't have and experienced what our students, faculty and staff of color, or LGBTQIA, or disabled have experienced. And I need to step back and say, "I'm here to learn from you, and you have to teach me what we have to do to change the climate."

One leader referenced the Civil Right Movement, acknowledging that there had been major progress since the 1960's, yet also that there was so much more work to be done, including addressing the dominant culture's defensiveness: "I think that's what we've learned this time, that the laws and the regulations and the policies are necessary but owning your biases is essential and we have to get over our defensiveness about it, like [saying] 'I'm not a racist.'"

At the same time, most felt that the campus as a whole learned a lot during the COVID-19 crisis about how to collaborate, adapt, and approach complex issues using a shared leadership framework and hoped that this would be leveraged to advance an equity-focused agenda for systemic change. One participant said, "We can move quickly when we need to and I hope that we'll continue to cut the red tape for things moving forward, we know how to put structures around really big, complex, messy things." There was expressed hope, among the leaders interviewed, that this was possible.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented five overarching themes that describe university leadership experiences during the time of "twin pandemics." These times of intense disruption and crisis called for leaders to invest in and strengthen a "culture of care" wherein the well-being of the campus community was prioritized. This required a "human-centered" approach to leadership

and to solving complex problems, and to incorporating empathy and compassion into everyday operations and decision-making. Authentic and servant leadership praxes were evident in how leaders expressed their vulnerability and humanity in the workplace. There was a sense that this relieved and reassured their teams. Identity and intersectionality, for women and particularly women leaders of color, amplified the intensity of their leadership experience during this time.

Communication and engagement were critical to a successful university response to the twin pandemics, and the use of multiple modes of engagement that included many stakeholders built a sense of community and connection. Leaders learned, through the pandemic and protests around racial equity and justice, that previous communication practices had been inadequate. Leaders saw the value in their recent, more intentional approaches and expected to continue to develop these practices.

The campus culture of interdisciplinary research and innovation was leveraged to address complex problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The expertise of the faculty and staff was brought to the forefront through inclusive and collaborative meetings and discussions, again, these were some of the critical "lessons learned" that leaders hoped would continue. The theme "Innovation, Collaboration and Adaptation" encapsulated both the intellectual collaboration as well as the new administrative partnerships that evolved through the response to COVID-19. Leaders built highly effective teams, empowered them to do their work, and got out of the way. Leaders described their function as "integrators" and "synthesizers," providing spaces for broad dissemination of information and a feedback loop that allowed for adaptation to new situations. They listened to the experts and to voices across campus that had historically not been included in decision-making efforts.

Finally, a broad institutional commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion was evident from all of the leaders interviewed; however, perspectives and views varied. The leaders' descriptions of personal journeys toward critical consciousness around race and equity, and the recognition of its significance, suggests that they are building an infrastructure rooted in data-informed accountability, responsibility, and equity. Combined with a willingness to partner across campus, these new endeavors suggest that the lessons learned during the COVID-19 crisis will be leveraged through an institutional commitment to continue to the work of racial, social, and educational justice.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study revealed five themes and related subthemes: (1) culture of care; (2) authentic leadership; (3) communication and engagement; (4) innovation, collaboration, and adaptation; and (5) centering equity. The themes were responsive to the research questions and provided an opportunity for reflecting on limitations and questions for future research. This chapter first addresses the findings of the study in the context of its research questions, follows with a discussion of its conceptual frameworks, and connects the results of the study with some of the vast literature on leadership in higher education. The chapter ends with recommendations for policy and practice.

Key Findings in Response to Research Question 1: Leadership Praxis

In response to my first research question, "How did leaders navigate their leadership praxis as the COVID-19 crisis and reckoning of systemic racism and inequity unfolded?", I

found that university leaders in this study described both individual behavior and a collective philosophy of leadership rooted in service, collaboration, and care. The COVID-19 pandemic appeared to amplify their pre-dispositions toward servant, authentic, and adaptive leadership (Northouse, 2022). Leaders in this study exhibited the hallmarks of servant leadership: creating value for the institution by putting team members and colleagues first, empowering them to grow and succeed, and approaching leadership with an ethical and moral orientation (Northouse, 2022). Similarly, adaptive leadership behaviors (Northouse, 2022) were strongly represented as leaders encouraged the campus community to adapt to rapidly shifting landscapes, while keeping a focus on maintaining calm and minimizing distress.

Authentic, Adaptive Servant Leaders at the Helm

While authentic leadership is difficult to define, it is often characterized by the life experiences of the leader, their relationships with their teams, and how this leadership practice is nurtured and developed in a person over time (Northouse, 2022). In challenging times, people seek comfort and guidance in those they consider to be real, genuine, and authentic leaders (Northouse, 2022). University leaders in this study expressed that they were able to show up authentically, feeling that this strengthened their relationships with their teams and colleagues. An area of research to explore beyond this study would be to examine the perceptions of faculty, students, and staff regarding the authenticity of leadership on the campus.

The theme "Culture of Care" reflects the alignment of organizational needs with those of the people who work within it, which was described by Bolman and Deal (2017) as the human resource leadership frame. Leaders adopted this frame by promoting behaviors and actions, such as change through collaboration and inclusive decision-making, connecting to staff and investing in them, building consensus, solving problems through teamwork, and ultimately, embracing a

commitment to organizational well-being through the prioritization of people's needs (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Manning, 2018). Adopting a culture of care in response to a viral pandemic is a logical response, particularly with respect to health and safety. Yet, leaders felt that they would continue this more holistic and empathetic leadership praxis to respond to other ongoing and complex challenges. They had a greater appreciation of the benefits of putting people first, which was how they saw their leadership roles.

Leaders navigated their praxis through a lens of authenticity, service, and care, promoting organizational well-being in a time of crisis (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). They drew from their own leadership journeys, leveraging their experience to advance the institution and care for the people who worked there. This finding illustrates the dynamic between leadership, institutional culture, and the ongoing feedback loop from the campus community in the context of complex challenges (Birnbaum, 1989). Building a more collaborative and inclusive campus community requires a collaborative leadership philosophy that includes and engages faculty, staff, and students (Hoff, 1999). Leaders expressed the importance of bringing many voices to the table, and how this greatly impacted their own leadership praxis. They now prefer a flattened organizational structure.

The leaders interviewed for this study expressed that a culture of care, empathy, and compassion provided the scaffolding necessary for effectively responding to the challenges facing higher education. At the same time, they understood the need for developing shared goals and objectives, along with strong data-informed assessments of progress (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kania & Kramer, 2011). Most expressed that their leadership praxis evolved in response to the crises of the last two years; they indicated that they had become more empathetic, appreciative of staff and their contributions, and willing to lead in a matrixed or flattened organizational

structure. Collectively, they also expressed that they hoped that these shifts would be sustained, that the culture of care would continue to evolve and strengthen within the institution. They were also realistic about the organizational structure and culture of higher education as resistant to administrative change (Manning, 2018) while striving to remain at the cutting edge of academic innovation.

Key Findings for Research Question 2: Organizational Culture

The findings that centered around organizational culture and structure described a highly innovative institution that prided itself on being on the forefront of interdisciplinary research. It was faculty-centered; the scholarship and expertise of the faculty was thought to drive the institution. This organization exhibited all the characteristics of a collegial academic culture, defined by Bergquist and Pawlak (2008): fluid, decentralized, and emanating from the academic disciplines and professional expertise of the faculty.

Leveraging Innovation and Interdisciplinarity to Break Down Silos

In response to my second research question, "To what extent did the organizational structures and culture of the institution influence their leadership response?", the collegial academic culture embedded in the institution facilitated the innovation and interdisciplinarity that led to a successful response to the COVID-19 crisis. Prominent in the interviews was the idea of leveraging faculty expertise, bringing those voices to the table, and incorporating them into the decision-making process. Academic and administrative units learned to work together toward common goals, adopting a shared leadership and collective impact approach (Holcombe et al., 2021; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Kania et al. 2022), and leveraging shared metrics and inclusive decision-making.

Shared leadership is guided less by position and rank (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). This approach led to greater transparency and engagement from different constituencies. Whether the collegial culture impacted the ways in which the university addressed inequity is an interesting question. Historically, the identity of the campus was centered in an academic culture that valued independence, autonomy, and scholarship and like many universities, has been slow to arrive to the work of equity and inclusion (Kezar et al., 2021). A shift, however, appears to have begun prior to the current disruptions, and equity, diversity, and inclusion were identified as campus priorities. Nevertheless, the opposition of independence and autonomy with collective and shared leadership presents an interesting question for further inquiry.

Collegial academic culture is rooted in the expertise of the faculty. Strong references were made to leadership behaviors and priorities that promoted organizational well-being and the personal and professional growth of all members of the university community. This is an academic culture coined by Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) as developmental culture. By being human-centered, the developmental academic culture lends itself to advancing equity and inclusion within an institution.

The collegial and developmental academic cultures were reflected in the findings and seemed to interact in a dynamic and iterative manner as the university navigated the crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the reckoning of systemic inequity. These cultures appeared to influence the decision-making processes and supported the campus' trajectory toward a shared leadership approach to solving the complex challenges in front of it.

Key Findings for Research Question 3: Addressing Racism and Inequity

My third question focused on the extent to which leadership centered equity in their decision-making process by asking: "How and to what extent did university leadership prioritize

addressing systemic inequity in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic?" The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted existing systemic inequities (Hartzell et al., 2021). One of the most important findings regarding this question was that the uprisings in response to and reckoning of systemic inequity and racism across the nation opened the door for discussions on campus in a manner that had not previously been possible. Every participant reflected on this and indicated that they saw and leveraged more opportunities to effect change through collective action and shared leadership (Kezar et al., 2021). The successful handling of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that the institution could apply similar practices to addressing racism and inequity in higher education where the whole campus community was encouraged to engage in decision-making (Vuori, 2011) to address these complex issues.

The subthemes within "Culture of Care," specifically "Human-Centered Leadership" and "Leading with Compassion and Empathy," capture the leadership praxis that could drive the campus toward greater organizational inclusion and equity. Central to these themes were the leaders' personal journeys toward critical consciousness as described by Dowd and Bensimon (2015) and Kezar et al. (2021). Dismantling systemic racism and inequity requires that leaders engage in a shared equity leadership journey (Ash et al., 2020). Several individuals in this study described their personal journeys in detail, highlighting how their experiences strengthened their resolve to dismantle inequitable and racist structures, or in some cases, awakened in them a new perspective on equity.

A commitment to equity in the decision-making process was consistently expressed in the responses and was amplified by the assessment made above: that the door was now open for more candid and frank conversations about race and inequity. Leaders described a culture of continual assessment, adaptability, and accountability in which those most marginalized or

affected by a decision or situation needed to be considered and prioritized (Kania et al. 2022).

Whether this will be sustained to effect long-term change remains to be seen. There was a

sentiment expressed that there is not universal alignment or commitment across campus

regarding the importance of this work.

Many aspects of a shared equity leadership framework were present in the findings of this

study. The practice of including many voices at the table is one that leaders thought brought

value to the campus and should be continued. It became a way to listen to the voices of those

with different lived experiences, promoting a more informed, inclusive, and just decision-making

process. Shared leadership principles allowed the university to successfully navigate the COVID-

19 pandemic. Further adopting these principles and applying them toward tackling systemic

inequity will make the connection to shared equity leadership (Kezar et.al, 2021). The sentiment

that applying what was learned about the university's effective response to COVID-19 to

addressing systemic inequity would lead to meaningful change was expressed by more than one

participant in this study. The question, again, is whether this practice can be sustained in the long

term, and whether greater alignment across campus can be achieved.

Conceptual Frameworks

The research questions were posed through conceptual frameworks at an individual and

institutional scale. Bolman and Deal's (1991, 2017) four frames of leadership informed the

inquiry into leadership perspectives and actions. Bergquist and Pawlak's (2008) concept of the

six cultures of the academy provided the framework for examining institutional structure and

culture. Complexity leadership theory (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009),

the concepts of shared leadership (Holcombe et al., 2021), and shared equity leadership (Kezar et

al., 2021) structured the inquiry into how leaders navigated their own leadership in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic inequity in higher education.

Bolman and Deal's Four Frames of Leadership

Frames direct how leaders think and respond and are influenced by organizational culture (Latta, 2020). Adopting a multi-frame perspective, or reframing, means addressing complex issues with an objective lens, emphasizing clarity, patience, and adaptivity (Bensimon, 1989; Bolman & Deal, 2015; Vuori, 2018). While my findings suggest that the primary frame adopted by participants in the study was the human resource leadership frame, there was also a strong reflection of the structural and symbolic frames evident in the participants' responses around aligning the needs of people with the needs of the organization. These frames emerged in the themes of "Culture of Care" and "Centering Equity." The leaders' human resource frame was accompanied by a structural frame emphasizing order, reason, efficiency, and data-driven decision-making. The symbolic frame was highlighted as leaders referred to instilling a sense of hope, calm, compassion, and care for the campus community. Leaders drew on the institutional cultures of innovation, interdisciplinarity, and a problem-solving ethos, adopting a multi-frame approach to leadership.

The absence of references to a political frame is noteworthy. Bolman and Deal (2017) defined this frame as stakeholders competing for scarce resources and jostling for position and power. This frame was either minimized as the crises unfolded or was not prominent among this group of leaders. Organizational culture influences leadership praxis (Latta, 2020) and suggests that the dominance of collegial, developmental. and tangible cultures (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008) results in the political frame being counter-productive and therefore less desirable for operating within the institution at this moment.

The Bolman and Deal (2017) model was a useful framework to examine and interpret the decision-making approaches and perspectives of individual leaders. In particular, the concept of multi-framing, or the ability to incorporate more than one frame simultaneously (Bensimon, 1989; Bolman & Deal, 1991, 2017), was essential to understanding how leaders navigated their own leadership praxis. Identified in the subtheme of "Sharing, Synthesizing, and Integrating," leaders had to adopt a multi-frame approach, one that allowed them to consider the complexities of the crises facing the institution.

Six Cultures of the Academy

The culture of an institution lays the groundwork for how it will respond in times of pressure and change (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Bowers et al., 2017), and understanding institutional culture is essential to understanding the dynamics of leadership (Latta, 2020). Given its stature as a research-intensive university, the dominance of the collegial culture in the institution in this study is not surprising. The elevation of and emphasis on faculty expertise are the drivers of academic success and reputation. However, the COVID-19 crisis, which happened at the same time as a national reckoning of racial injustice, thrust forward two other academic cultures: developmental and tangible. Developmental culture promotes investment in organizational wellbeing by allocating resources to support the professional and personal growth of the members of the organization, while the tangible culture is reflected in the desire to keep as many elements of academic normalcy as possible (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). Continuing to offer classes, bringing students back to campus to live and learn, and adapting to the constraints of the virus while retaining the elements of the mission of the institution as an in-person university are hallmarks of a tangible academic culture. Elements of virtual culture appeared out of necessity, and some aspects will remain as hybrid instruction and flexible work arrangements.

However, many leaders also understood what had been lost when the university operated completely remotely, reinforcing the strong desire to return to an in-person experience.

An advocacy culture is manifested in most institutions of higher education as the ongoing tension between the administration and the faculty (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). The pandemic seemed to eliminate this tension to some degree, unifying the campus community and demonstrating how people were able to work together to further a common goal. All leaders expressed the desire to continue this collaborative approach to resolving differences and tackling complex challenges.

Complexity Leadership Theory

Complexity leadership theory focuses on dynamic and emergent conditions within complex systems, suggesting that optimal leadership operates in a contextual and interactive manner (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). This concept emphasizes relationships within the organization, yet also maintains the key role of leaders, especially within bureaucratic hierarchies (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). The complex and dynamic process described by participants in this study—emergent decision-making, reliance on fluid data and information, frequent, large, and inclusive meetings—all combined to exemplify complexity leadership.

Complexity leadership theory provides a framework to understand how organizations respond to uncertainty, considering the complexity of the organization, its people, culture, and history (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). The experiences of leaders in this study illustrated how adaptive and shared leadership are essential to institutional effectiveness and contribute to a culture of innovation and collaboration in response to rapidly changing external conditions

(Bolman & Deal, 2015). During the time of this study, the one constant was change, and leaders necessarily had to operate in a dynamic and shifting landscape.

Shared Leadership and Shared Equity Leadership

Of the conceptual frameworks that scaffolded this study, shared leadership and shared equity leadership best reflect the leadership experiences of the last two years. As the campus faced the COVID-19 pandemic and the uprisings against racial inequity, the complexity of these challenges required different approaches to leadership. University presidents and the executive leadership alone could not navigate the ever-changing conditions that the pandemic created. A shared leadership approach became the norm out of necessity, gathering expertise and knowledge from all levels of the organization. This approach altered the way decision-making and collaboration took place on campus. By shifting who was at the table to ask questions, to understand the challenge and leverage the opportunity, to consider possible solutions, and ultimately, who had the authority to act, the campus adopted a shared leadership approach (Holcombe et al., 2021). This shared leadership praxis could provide a path toward a more effective approach to shared governance, shared responsibility, and problem-solving (Holcombe et al., 2021; Hrabowski III, 2019), particularly as the institution faces increasingly complex challenges.

Future Research

One of the limitations of this study was that it was focused on only one constituency at the university, primarily a decision-making body with privilege and authority. A complimentary piece to this research will be to examine the experiences and perspectives of faculty, staff, and students during this time. In their study of perceptions of authentic leadership, Williams et al. (2012) found that perceptions of crisis are positively related to attributions of charisma but not

related to authentic leadership. To be authentic, leaders must be truthful, open, and honest at all times, and a crisis may not be a sufficient condition for the emergence of perception of authenticity (Williams et al., 2012). Men and Stacks (2014) found that transparency and authenticity are critical to the employee-organization relationship and demonstrated the impact of authentic leadership on an organization. The perceptions held by the campus community in response to leadership decisions and actions would provide an important lens for making a holistic assessment of leadership during crises.

The findings of this study also suggest that a deeper inquiry into the experiences of leaders of color, exploring identity and intersectionality in leadership, particularly for women leaders of color, is warranted. Several studies have examined the intersectional experiences of women leaders of color (Fong-Batkin, 2011; Gasman et al., 2015; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Turner, 2002), but the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in the context of systemic racism and inequity provides a unique setting to further explore and understand their experiences.

This research study also revealed gender differences in how leaders navigated their own leadership during this time of crisis. Much research has focused on the differences in how men and women lead organizations (Blackmore et al., 2015; Brinson, 2006; Christman & McClellan, 2012; Eagly et al., 1992). However, there is less research on whether women and men lead differently in crisis (Haack, 2017), particularly in higher education. This is an important topic for further inquiry as more women and women of color ascend to leadership positions in higher education.

Opportunities exist to examine the processes, experiences, and outcomes of other institutions of higher education and other leadership teams even within the same system. In particular, understanding how less well-resourced institutions (i.e., without a medical school,

heath system, or significant research enterprise) navigated COVID-19 and the reckoning of systemic inequity. This research could provide an inventory of best practices not only on how to handle future disruptions but also on how to tackle long existing challenges confronting higher education.

This study found that leaders considered equity to be an important priority in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and they developed a renewed or new commitment to consider equity, diversity, and inclusion as fundamental to their leadership decisions. The twin pandemics provide an opportunity to examine how that commitment is operationalized, and whether there are specific actions or initiatives that delve deeper into creating a more equitable institution of higher education. Questions that could be asked include, "What are the specific policy revisions or organizational changes that support efforts to dismantle systemic racism and inequity?" These are not changes that happen quickly in bureaucratic institutions, so there is a space for a longitudinal inquiry into how actions taken today effect generational change. There was a sense in this study that leaders' praxis was changed by the experiences of the last two years, but it is unknown whether this change will be sustained. Revisiting or performing a follow up interview in a few years could reveal whether this was the case.

Recommendations and Implications for Policy and Practice

The COVID-19 pandemic offered a unique opportunity to understand how those in leadership positions navigated their own praxis as the crises evolved and how a shared leadership model resulted in better outcomes for the campus community. While systemic racism and inequity in higher education are long-standing problems, the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated the barriers to educational equity experienced by marginalized communities. Understanding the dynamics between leadership, institutional structure, and culture when responding to the

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COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism and inequity will help institutions of higher education better prepare for future crises of similar scale and threat.

This study revealed several strategies and approaches campuses can adopt that could result in better outcomes when confronting complex and systemic problems. First, and most importantly, those who occupy leadership positions at the highest levels of the university must model a shared leadership approach if this is to be adopted across the campus. Inclusive leadership behavior will be emulated and adopted, particularly in a hierarchical structure, if members of the campus community see this as being positively reinforced (Northouse, 2022). Second, shared or adaptive leadership approaches should be visibly rewarded as an incentive to other units. And finally, collaborative initiatives seeking to address complex and challenging issues on campus should be properly resourced and reinforced with measurable and replicable metrics (Kania et al., 2022), with an accountability framework to ensure transparency.

This study of a university leadership's response to the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated how other systemic challenges can be confronted though a shared and adaptive leadership framework. Shared leadership changes the way people feel (increased confidence, trust, sense of belonging), how they act (inclusive, solution-oriented, engaged, creative, innovative), and how the organization performs (improved efficiency, quality, performance, creativity, innovation) (Holcombe et al., 2021). The outcomes of shared leadership seem almost utopian, particularly as higher education remains deeply hierarchical. To see the benefits of a shared leadership approach, leaders must promote horizontal leadership from all sectors of campus, challenging hierarchy and the leader-follower binary (Kezar et al., 2021). This involves trusting colleagues and relinquishing power and decision-making, which can often be uncomfortable and destabilizing (Kezar et al., 2021; Holcombe et al., 2021). The current structure and culture of

higher education will be the biggest challenge to adopting a shared leadership philosophy—and the buy-in of leadership.

Documenting how leaders led in this crisis and how they understood their own leadership will help emerging leaders develop their own leadership praxis. This study examined the approaches and experiences of a group of executive, senior leaders and builds on a relatively recent body of work that describes higher education leadership as a shared venture rooted in an equity-minded approach (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Kezar et al., 2021). The knowledge gained through this study will not only help inform responses to future crises but will also provide additional insight into leadership approaches and better training and development of leaders to solve ongoing, systemic challenges in higher education. Onboarding of new leaders and/or promotion of individuals into leadership positions should include either coaching, peer mentoring or professional development that supports a shared leadership approach and outlines the expectations of those in campus leadership positions. This can also serve as an opportunity to reinforce campus values and priorities, ensuring that leaders understand their roles and contributions.

Addressing complex and pervasive challenges such as systemic inequity requires a shared leadership approach (Kezar et al., 2021, Holcombe et al., 2021) matched with institutional commitment (Kania et al., 2022). This can be realized when leadership teams are comprised of individuals who embrace this approach, but also by building leadership teams that value human-centered and inclusive leadership philosophies. Building a culture of care on campus requires this type of leadership.

Communication is an essential element of leadership, one that shapes the human experience in any organization (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). The findings of this study reinforced

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the importance of communication, not only in a crisis, but as an ongoing process of engagement with the campus community. Leaders in this study responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and the reckoning of systemic racial inequity with more direct and frequent communication, employing new modalities and strategies to reinforce their messages. Leaders should foster communication through multiple venues and remain accessible and visible to the campus communities they serve.

This study also offers a reflection on the use of the description "twin pandemics" to describe the confluence of the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism and inequity in higher education (J. Cole et al., 2021) and whether there is a false equivalency in the use of that term. COVID-19 and systemic racism and inequity are not identical crises. While the word "pandemic" is derived from Greek, meaning "all people," the use of the term suggests that there is no agency to dismantle systemic racism, which is socially constructed. This was noted by a participant in this study and is an important reminder of how researchers use terms that can undermine approaches to solve complex challenges. Referring to COVID-19 and systemic racism and inequity as "twin pandemics" suggests a level of inevitability of defeat. Terminology sets up models in people's minds, which may suggest approaches for solutions that turn out to be weak or inappropriate.

However, these crises manifested together and their confluence affected leaders differently, particularly leaders of color, whose experience was described as personal and traumatic. Many navigated personal traumas related to systemic racism and inequity, while also navigating a significant leadership role. Ongoing reflection and conversation about the intersectionality and positionality of leaders of color, particularly women, is an important aspect of leadership development and training. Greater attention and thought should be devoted to this

aspect of leadership as more women and leaders of color enter executive leadership roles in higher education.

As a university grows, the question becomes, how do you sustain the innovative and collaborative spirit that can help solve complex problems? Shared leadership is a philosophical frame and mantra that must be instilled from the top. It is sometimes referred to as a "matrix" organizational structure. Ultimately, if a shared leadership framework requires support from the highest ranks of the organization to be realized, the structure of academic institutions will continue to be driven by a hierarchy. Generational changes in leadership occur, which can effect change, but without a new paradigm infused in leadership training and development around principles of shared decision-making and leadership, the efficacy and adaptability of institutions of higher education will be hindered.

There is hope, however. Recent work on the topic suggests that the model of shared leadership is gaining traction in higher education (Holcombe et al., 2021; Hrabowski III, 2019; Kezar et al., 2021; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). There remain complex and divisive issues facing institutions of higher education that require a new way of thinking, and leadership is one of the most critical elements in that journey.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Date/Time of Interview: _____

Interviewer Name: Alison Sanders

Respondent Initials & Title: _____

Introduction and review of interview protocol

Thank you so much for meeting with me. As you know, in addition to my position on this campus, I am currently a graduate student at UC Davis working on my doctorate in Educational Leadership. My research project focuses on leaders and the leadership processes that informed the university's response to the dual crises of the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of systemic racism and inequity.

I am particularly interested in understanding leadership approaches to addressing inequity during the crises of the last two years, the role of leaders and institutional culture in decision-making and institutional responses.

This interview will take about an hour. Your participation is voluntary and there is no penalty for declining to participate. There is no anticipated risk or benefit if you choose to participate, and you may choose to stop the interview at any time.

Although this project focuses specifically on your experiences as a campus leader during 2020 and 2021, please feel free to speak about whatever comes to mind in relation to the questions. There are no right or wrong answers.

Prior to this interview, you received a Letter of Information. Since I will be audio recording the interview for research purposes, I need your informed consent to do so before we begin. Both the

campus and your identity will be anonymized to ensure confidentiality. Do you consent to this

interview and to the audio and/or video recording?

[Wait for subject to answer]

We will now start the interview. Do you have any questions before I begin the recording?

[Wait for subject to answer]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

I'd like to begin with your own leadership, your perspective as a campus leader (describe:

member of executive leadership, task force, or appropriate role).

Interview Questions

    A. Leadership Perspectives

        1) Can you talk a little about your leadership journey? How did you get here?

        2) What leadership philosophies or frameworks drive your work?

            a. Follow up: How would you describe yourself as a leader?

        3) How would you describe your evolution as a leader over the last two years since

           January 2020?

            a. Follow up: what has changed for you?

        4) When you consider the challenges of last two years how would you describe the

           decision-making process of the university's leadership team(s)?

        5) When you consider the challenges of last two years, what did you feel was most

           important to prioritize? Did that occur?

        6) When you think about the events/protests across the nation around systemic

           racism and inequity, how did this frame or affect your leadership?

       a. Follow up: Was there a moment or a series of events that catalyzed your leadership response?

7) Do you think this will lead to long-term change in education systems?

       a. If yes, where do you see change?

8) What if anything, would you have done anything differently? Please elaborate.

9) What elements of this experience might you carry forward into your future work?

B. Institutional context

1) How would you describe the identity and culture of this institution? What is prioritized or elevated?

2) How would you describe the leadership culture of this institution?

3) How do you think the leadership culture in this institution influenced the decision-making process?

4) In your opinion, what were the most important elements of the University's response to the pandemic?

5) How well do you think the university met its goals?

6) What were some lessons learned and will these be sustained?

7) How do you think the disruptions/crises of the last two years will impact higher education?