

EFFECTIVELY NAVIGATING LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS IN A HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Leadership transition in higher education is inevitable and critically important. This article seeks to describe a successful leadership transition that has occurred in a doctoral program director position of a religious graduate school, written by the outgoing director, the incoming director, and the director of the department in which this transition took place. Considerations of a leadership transition as articulated in the literature are examined. The authors offer key principles and recommendations for higher education institutions approaching or undergoing a leadership change with the aim to encourage a smooth and stable transition.

Keywords: leadership transition, succession plan, higher education, faculty, leadership, religious institutions, Christian colleges

INTRODUCTION

Leadership transition in any organization or institution is a critically significant event in the life of that organization, and such leadership change in a higher education institution is no different. One assumes that the higher the level of leadership transition, the more significant and impactful that change brings about; for example, bringing in a president of a college can result in new directions for, and in some cases even, the survivability of the institution. But leadership transition at every level in higher education—provost, deans and associate deans, and department directors—influences important differences in how the academic institution functions and in the overall success of the institution. These differences would include the quality of the educational programs being offered, the desirability of those programs sufficient to attract new students, and the cultural contribution the institution makes to its surrounding community and to society in general. In other words, the leadership transitions that occur in the “guts” of the academic institution greatly influence the life of that institution.

This article seeks to describe a successful leadership transition that has occurred in a doctoral program director position of a religious graduate school, written by the outgoing director, the incoming director, and the director of the department in which this transition took place. We define successful transition as taking place in two phases. First is the selection of an appropriate candidate who fulfills the well-thought-out description and purpose of the position; this phase would include the job competence of the candidate, the character of that person, and the overall fit for that described position. But having made that selection, step two follows, which is the integration of the person into the position that would include the nuances of the school, successful job performance, and development of relationships within the department team.

The authors believe successful transition happens differently and needs to happen differently for different schools, different positions in the schools, and for different healthy and unhealthy institutions. Consequently, the description of what has transpired in our situation, the model presented

here, is not meant to be a cookie-cutter model that would work well in every situation. Sometimes, for example, the outgoing leader is forced out of position or leaves the position in a very unhealthy situation. A transition from a leader who does not want to leave is a much different situation than one where the outgoing leader happily moves on and perhaps even helps good transition to happen; the model described here relates to a leader, happily leaving his position.

Nonetheless, how this leadership transition took place has the potential of being helpful in various places and positions, and so it is shared here. Certain principles of practice appear to be workable in many situations, and these principles of practice are not only based upon experience, but also upon literature research.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN A LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Much of the literature on organizational transition naturally occurs at the highest levels of leadership, for example CEO transitions (Charan, 2005), or presidential leadership for higher education (Klein & Raintry, 2013). In this literature the discussion often centers around the wisdom of leadership development within the organization as the new leader is one that has been promoted from within—or the alternative approach, which is to bring in a qualified leader from the outside of the seeking organization who has demonstrated success in his or her present organization. Of course, the advantages of the “insider” approach is that person knows the organization, knows the cultural nuances of the organization, and already has relationships with other key leaders in the organization. The advantages of the “outsider” is that this person already has a record of success and could bring in a fresh perspective and perhaps new energy (Charan, 2005). While both approaches are utilized in business and educational institutions, the business world suggests the insider approach would be the better approach while literature on academic presidential succession suggests that bringing in an insider is more of a rarity, due to lack of interest on the part of most educational administrators and also due to internal candidates having a track record within the institution that does not appeal to the various constituencies of the institution of higher education (Klein & Raintry, 2013).

Understanding the Unique Qualities of the Organization

A recent book by Buller (2019), points out the complexity of transformation/transition in higher education because of the various constituencies within the organization, all of those constituencies having some basis of power for change. Buller (2019) considers higher education as an example of a “distributed organization” (rather than a “hierarchical organization” or “decentralized organization”), which operates by shared governance:

The governing board retains fiduciary responsibility and sets basic policies. The administration implements those policies and is responsible for day-to-day operation of the institution. The faculty is responsible for the curriculum of the school, the provost is responsible for academic personnel, and the students are responsible for the allocation of student activity funds (Buller, 2019, pp. 16-17).

Consequently, when one considers leadership transition within an institution of higher education, the environment and culture is unique for making leadership changes. The process of change will often occur differently at different power bases and levels of leadership in the organization.

The search process, however, in many organizations might be a both-and kind-of search where both internal candidates and external candidates may be considered. In the educational department under consideration in this article—perhaps mid-level in the organization—that both-and approach has been the modus operandi for bringing in new leaders for the department. Thus, it is necessary to ask who might be the best candidate for this position, regardless whether that person is an insider or an outsider?

Understanding the Role of the Outgoing Leader

The aforementioned discussion is an essential part of the first phase of the transition namely an intentional plan to select the proper candidate. Literature from a church context is instructive on good transitional process. Vanderbloemen, Bird, and Ortberg (2014) suggests that planning for a successful transition to a new leader is a time-consuming process which necessitates early intentional planning and input from the

transitioning out leader. As part of that process, descriptions of the new leader's role should be updated to reflect the expertise and qualities that are desired for this new person, rather than looking back to the outgoing leader.

Continuing with their discussion of pastoral succession, these authors emphasize the role of the departing leader as significant for the success of the incoming leader. The authors suggest that this leader ask, "What would a successful hand-off look like and how do I achieve it? What do I need to do now to prepare for passing the leadership baton?" (Vanderbloemen et al., 2014, p. 41). Kramer's (2018) research in a dissertation study similarly furthers these thoughts in finding that the top three traits of a departing pastor for successful transition were humility, concern for the ongoing good of the church, and the willingness to let go of authority and decision making.

In the business world, Noel Tichy writes:

...At virtually every company or organization on the planet, whether run for profit, not-for-profit, public or private, family or shareholder owned, there are two immutable facts about leadership: 1. Leadership matters. 2. Continuity of leadership matters. The corollary of this thesis is that the defining legacy of any individual's leadership is the quality and outcome of his or her commitment to putting a process in place expressly designed to ensure an orderly transition from present to future leaders—at any time, for any reason—with minimal disruption and drama. (Tichy, 2014, pp. 20-21)

Tichy (2014) is writing largely to CEO leadership replacement, but it is not difficult to move from a business context and a church context to an academic one. Clearly, the departing academic leader can help the transition process by working with other academic leaders to develop the transition process that leads to selection of an appropriate replacement for himself or herself. After the new leader is selected that outgoing leader can encourage and inform his or her replacement in job details and cultural nuances of the organization and position. This step involves the outgoing leader taking a long look at the importance of the position he or she has held in

significantly impacting the lives of students so as to continue that positive influence through a new leader and beyond his or her own leadership role.

In summary, the keys to the successful initial stages of transition are the emphasis on a: (1) thoughtful, intentional long-term planning for a replacement for the new leader by key organizational leaders; (2) implementation of that plan, carefully choosing either an appropriate leader that has demonstrated success or potential success in other environments or choosing a leader already within the present organization; and (3) helpful involvement of the present leader already in place to insure a positive handoff of the position to the new leader.

Understanding Relationships

The next phase of transition occurs when the new leader is actually in place, assuming the position, and successfully performing the duties of the position. Gmelch (2000) helpfully details potential steps to satisfactorily assuming leadership in an academic context; the article specifically emphasizes the socialization process in considering what a successful transition might look like (pp. 68-87). In looking at various leadership contexts, Gmelch (2000) follows a corporate study by Gabarro (1985) that lists a five-step process deemed effective in most organizational contexts: (1) taking hold, (2) immersion, (3) reshaping; (4) consolidation, and (5) refinement (pp. 68; 72-75).

What Gmelch (2000) and others emphasize is the importance of the new leader developing positive relationships in the organization. The author talks about the real difficulty in leadership transitions that include "passing on knowledge, relationships, and power" (p. 76), and the author quotes another educator's conclusion that "it is much easier to transfer knowledge and power than it is to transfer relationships" (Sorenson, 2000, p. 76).

A common problem in the transition process is that the five-step socialization process often occurs without much support or encouragement from either the outgoing leader or other academic leaders with whom the new leader is working with and for. Gmelch (2000) says, "Socialization of academic leaders in higher education appears to be left to chance. While this may be a strategy in itself, institutions must realize the impact socialization tactics have on the dean's propensity

toward reinforcing the status quo or promoting innovation” (p. 85).

Authors Ciampa and Dotlich (2015) discuss why leadership transition in organizational settings is often not successful by pointing to the lack of involvement of other organizational leaders to help in the incorporation of the new leader into the position (p. 126), including “the inability of the CEO and the successor to form a positive relationship” (p. 173). In other words, the one who might be most helpful in a successful transition—the outgoing leader—is not only not helpful, but rather may be a hindrance to the new leader’s success.

Assuming the hiring phase has occurred with proper oversight and planning and the candidate that has been carefully selected arrives with potential ability to accomplish the position effectively, the most important ingredient in that person’s potential success in the position is the relationships that are developed in the organization, starting with the outgoing leader and continuing with other key leaders - other faculty, department leaders, organizational staff, and administration of the organization (Gmelch, 2000, p. 76).

Whatever candidate selection is made, the success of the transition in many ways depends upon the culture of the organization. Whether a good or not-so-good candidate is selected, if the relationships with the directive team and department within the organization are poisonous, success for the new leader is very questionable. That is why the team that is part of both the hiring and the onboarding process is so very important. Multiple literature sources relating to various organizations point to the importance of good team function as significant for successful transition (Amado and Elsner, 2007; Buller, 2019; Lencioni, 2002).

LEADERSHIP TRANSITION AT LBC|CAPITAL

The Decision to Retire

I, Hal Pettegrew, had reached the age of 70, had been in leadership position as Associate Dean for Doctoral Studies, then program director for the PhD in Leadership, for six years—when I decided it was time for me to step back from that position. My health was still good, and the program had been reasonably successful in terms of quality and quantity. We had involved key academic professors

from our own school and also well-known adjunct professors from other institutions that aligned to our academic culture. At one point more than 50 students, from various vocations, were involved in the program, some just beginning in seminars but others working in the dissertation stage, and feedback from our students was very positive. The PhD program in leadership was being considered as a successful endeavor by our own administrators and outsiders viewing the program.

The number of students, however, had decreased, and my last cohort of students was at four students. Also, though I had promoted and been regularly involved in online environments for a number of years, I was not of the “techie” generation and was somewhat run down from learning new digital platforms and learning processes. Finally, I was aware of the large number of capable PhD graduates who were seeking positions of academic leadership, and I thought perhaps someone else, probably younger than myself, could take the program to the next level of excellence. Hence, my decision to leave a good situation at this point in my life.

Having determined that decision, my first conversation was with the department chair, Dr. Richard Rhoads, and the school provost, Dr. Philip Dearborn. At that meeting, I asked these two leaders if perhaps it was time to shut down the program—that perhaps we had had a good run for six or seven years, but perhaps the environment had changed, and with my leaving, maybe we should drop the program. That question was answered with an emphatic “no,” that the program brought great value to the school, and that it was in a sense a capstone program for the school community. Also, what was being accomplished in the lives of students was too valuable to stop. To say the least, this response was very gratifying to myself, and I was pleased at the commitment to continue with this PhD program!

I believe this statement of commitment was step one of a good transition as answering the question of a program’s value was and is significant for attracting quality leadership. What good leader would possibly move across country to lead a program that was not valued by the community? And if the program was valuable then our search for the next leader would be taken very seriously by the academic community. We could easily

have skipped over this discussion and assumed we would just carry on with business as usual, but articulating the significance of the program was important for all three of us at the table on that day and for the school.

The Search Process

Dr. Rhoads, department chairperson, and I began planning the first part of the transition that would include consideration of the job description and the equally important search committee. The job description for myself formed the basis for the new leader, and very little changes were made with that description. Dr. Rhoads primarily selected the members of the search committee, largely made up of other department chairs.

I was also a part of the search committee and hence was involved in this transition from the beginning. As the literature suggests, the active involvement of the outgoing leader is a significant factor in a successful transition. In fact, I was a key member of the committee in the first phase of the transition and my involvement continued well into the second phase. After the committee was formed and the job opportunity was posted, we received numerous curriculum vitae (CVs) from persons interested in the position. Dr. Rhoads and I served as early screeners to the CVs we received; if it was clear that the candidate was not what we were looking for in terms of degree specialty and experience that person was notified. Both Dr. Rhoads and I looked carefully and seriously at these CVs, but since we were united on the needed quality and characteristics of the potential candidates, we were able to eliminate a number of the candidates so the entire committee would not be bogged down reviewing candidates. If we differed on whether to move the reference forward, we would move that person forward for the consideration of the entire committee.

Once the vacancy was made known, almost immediately, and surprisingly to myself, we had three well-known national candidates inquire about the position. This interest was even prior to our publicly posting the position, and the fact that the position received immediate attention from very experienced leaders was an indicator of the quality of the program. Both Dr. Rhoads and I knew these candidates from professional contacts; all three candidates had taught in our

doctoral program. We seriously considered one of the three candidates who was brought before the search committee, interviewed by various levels of administration within the school, and subsequently was dismissed based upon mutual agreement with the candidate. This candidate was someone that I personally thought would be a great choice for the position, but the entire process of multiple interviews within the school demonstrated that many voices of involvement is a good thing in the selection process. I did have involvement and influence in the selection of the proper candidate, but fortunately I did not have ultimate authority to make the selection.

Nonetheless, in the selection of the final candidate, my presence on the committee was very important. Dr. Kevin Gushiken, my replacement, was one of the CVs brought to the committee. Dr. Gushiken's academic credentials looked good but at first glance he appeared to lack much experience for the position. During one of the committee meetings I recall one of the committee members suggesting that his resume be dismissed for that reason; however, I could not but help notice that Dr. Gushiken and I had very much in common. We shared two educational institutions in common, and both he and I had been involved as pastors in a common denominational church. My reasoning was that for the sake of continuity of the doctoral program, his candidacy certainly needed to be seriously considered. After various interview processes, Dr. Gushiken became the choice to be my replacement. To this day, our commonality of background has been a uniting factor (with the exception that he roots for the University of Michigan and I root for Ohio State University), and has been an important factor in the transition. If there had been a need for a change of direction in the PhD program, our commonality would not have been important, but in the case of moving forward with a reasonably successful program, such a significant change was not important; the commonality has been an important matter.

The Perspective of the Giver

Dr. Kevin Gushiken was hired in November 2016 with a start date of January 1. However, since he needed to sell a home, buy a home, and move his family, as well as transition from the church he was pastoring, the decision was made in discussion with

Dr. Rhoads and myself that Dr. Gushiken would work remotely for the spring semester, joining us at the beginning of the summer. During the winter/spring semester, he would come to campus four times for three or four days each. I would continue to work on a part-time basis during this transition.

At first, I was somewhat disappointed that Dr. Gushiken could not immediately be present as I was ready to give up responsibilities which included an accreditation team visiting the campus. In hindsight, I believe the transition between Dr. Gushiken and myself worked better as a result of this arrangement. We chatted and corresponded regularly. As I received emails from administration and students, I began forwarding these emails to Dr. Gushiken for him to get a feel for what kinds of issues might arise. During that semester, a breakdown in communication occurred between a professor and the students. After consultation with Dr. Rhoads and Dr. Gushiken, I determined to solve this issue myself. In retrospect, I believe it would have been difficult for Dr. Gushiken to have effectively resolved the issue since he did not know the students and professor as well as I did. These relationships and knowledge allowed me to resolve the crisis. In regard to accreditation issues, we shared the responsibilities during that semester with Dr. Gushiken coming to campus during the accreditor's visit, important in that he continued to gain knowledge not only about our doctoral program but learning about campus wide strengths and concerns.

Each semester, as was my common practice (and a practice which Dr. Gushiken has continued), I had students over to my house for fellowship and communication of program policies and information. We arranged for Dr. Gushiken to be present during this fellowship time for purposes of meeting the students and allowing students to ask questions of Dr. Gushiken. He also shared his expectations of what a good dissertation might look like, not greatly different than my own expectations but stated in a slightly different way.

It does not seem like rocket science to say that communicating between the giver and the receiver is essential (as the literature suggests), but such communication was essential and helpful to effectively allow Dr. Gushiken to assume leadership of the program. As was stated, because of our common backgrounds, it was easy for us

to communicate, even to the point of a solid friendship. In the event of different backgrounds or a changing academic situation, it might take more work to make the handoff successful.

Since his coming to lead the program, our communication continues as a constant event, but I have intentionally remained silent and uninvolved in details of his leadership. I believe I have only made one very minor suggestion on a program detail during recent months and years. Dr. Gushiken has been gracious enough to continue to update me on happenings in the program, especially as related to students I helped bring into the program. In addition, the fact that we are writing this article together is an indicator of our successful transition!

The Perspective of the Receiver

I, Kevin Gushiken, officially began the position in January 2017. Yet, two institutional decisions prior to my first day greatly impacted the transition. First, the hiring process involved a two-step process. My wife and I were invited to campus for a visit and initial round of interviews. This first step allowed us to discern the institution, the program, team members, and the surrounding community. The college was committed to providing space for my wife and me to discern whether this position was a good fit. If both parties—the institution and us—agreed to move forward with the position, a second visit was scheduled. One month later we returned to campus with our children for a deeper exploration of schools and neighborhoods as well as interviews with key leaders on campus, including the president and several vice-presidents. The intent was to create genuine space for all parties to discern whether to move forward. In hindsight, this process accomplished two benefits to the eventual transition. First, it enabled me to fully know the intricacies of the position and expectations. Such knowledge provided clarity and definition that enabled me to begin the position well. Second, I was introduced to key leaders on campus even before I began the position. As such, relationships were already being cultivated prior to my first day of employment. Equally, this process infused buy-in from executive leadership to the position and me, thus more effectively enabling me to transition well and succeed.

The second institutional decision involved

personnel and financial commitment to the period of transition. In light of working remotely, I was deeply thankful that Dr. Pettegrew was willing and able to continue in the position during the handoff. Having a transition that involved a significant overlap in time and responsibilities contributed to its success. It allowed for a seamlessness. Even though this commitment required time and financial commitment, it was critical to the long-term stability of the program. As such, Dr. Pettegrew was able to handle institutional matters in a timely manner since he knew key persons to be contacted. In addition, he was able to resolve difficult issues due to his relationship with professors and students that could have been worsened if I addressed them with such minimal background or interaction.

In addition to the aforementioned, there are three things that I specifically contribute to the effectiveness of the transition from my perspective. First and most importantly, Dr. Pettegrew intentionally provided space for me to step into the position, not only in terms of responsibilities but also casting a vision. It would have been tempting for him to control the program he oversaw for years. Yet, he humbly handed off the reigns of the program physically and emotionally. Specifically, he encouraged me to rethink the program and make adjustments as I felt necessary. Within the first year, I decided to shift our approach to comprehensives from oral exams to a defense of two publishable papers. Such a change was a significant shift for the program. As I evaluated such a change, Dr. Pettegrew provided valuable wisdom and more importantly support for the decision, including endorsing it to students in the program.

Second, Hal shared his social capital with me. He encouraged individuals to reach out to me with questions or communication needs. He publicly supported and endorsed me for the role. In no capacity did he hoard his relationships or influence, rather he offered them to me in order that I could succeed. During the onsite visits while I worked remotely, he arranged for numerous meetings with key institutional leaders and stakeholders. For the most part, he participated in these meetings to offer his support and any necessary clarification. Furthermore, he championed me to the adjuncts and dissertation readers, who may have been hesitant to partner with someone new. By doing

so, he gave me social capital that otherwise could have taken years to earn. He also educated me on the unique policies and processes at Capital Seminary. Such knowledge assisted in me making decisions in an institutionally-sensitive manner. At times, I felt overwhelmed at the magnitude of the position but he never stood back passively, rather he encouraged and advocated for me.

Third, we implemented a weekly schedule to chat about the program, the position, and its intricacies. These meetings involved discussing practical pieces to the position—policies, timelines, and protocols. However, the critical benefit to these meetings involved sharing institutional and program history. This cultural knowledge enabled me to effectively ease into the position without stepping on relational or procedural landmines. Through such conversations, I learned unique personalities of students, challenges experienced in specific courses, and necessary competencies for overseeing a doctoral program. Having never led an academic program, Dr. Pettegrew guided me through the unique features of doctoral education, including helpful practices for interacting with professors and students. On numerous occasions, I remember coming to our meetings with dozens of questions. He patiently answered each of them. Over the next year, we transitioned from weekly meetings to monthly ones and eventually an arrangement where we met as needed.

In sum, the humble extension of the position and all the necessary knowledge to succeed provided was instrumental to the success of the transition. And, as a result, these interactions cultivated a friendship that exists today characterized by communication that is authentically bi-directional where I can approach him for advice and direction. The success of the transition is partly reflected in him continuing to teach a course in the program even after the handoff was complete.

The Perspective of the Overseer

I, Rick Rhoads, had become the overseeing chairperson just prior to learning of Dr. Hal Pettegrew's intention of retirement. During the fall of 2015, Dr. Pettegrew shared his intention of retirement during a regularly scheduled one-on-one monthly meeting. Though Dr. Pettegrew's news did not come as a surprise, it certainly left me with the realization of the daunting task that

now required finding an adequate replacement for a leader of great wisdom and respect.

Early in the process, Dr. Pettegrew and I met for the purpose of evaluating the existing program, considering institutional support, setting expectations, and ultimately casting vision. It was also during this time that a series of key questions began to emerge requiring further conversation and clarification. What length of time would Dr. Pettegrew be willing to participate in during the transition? Did the greater administration of LBC|Capital support ongoing doctoral work for an additional season of development? Would Dr. Pettegrew consider serving as a potential member of the search committee? How much involvement is appropriate regarding the existing director during the search, hiring transition process, and post-hiring onboard process?

During the fall of 2015, each of these questions were considered with adequate resolution as well as expectations set for respective stakeholders. Essential to creating the foundation for healthy change was the involvement of key stakeholders each displaying a high level of emotional health. The presence of emotional health among stakeholders allowed for significant differentiation, honesty, and transparency regarding foundational questions. This foundation provided the potential for healthy power leadership transition to take place.

Once foundational questions were answered, a team of mutually healthy, vision-aligned, discerning individuals were assembled as our search team. The search team consisted of three separate chairpersons from various departments as well as two directors from the primary department of hire. Each search committee team member was vetted and agreed upon by both Dr. Pettegrew and myself. A new revised job description was created, re-envisioning potential needs and gifts for a future season of development and growth associated with the program. An additional one sheet document was created on vision, values, and alignment characteristics for the purpose of discernment related to the search committee.

As the search process began in the fall of 2015, an initial surge of applicants was received capturing a demographic spanning from local church leadership to nationally and globally known leaders and educators. Approximately 60 applicants were received in total. All 60 applications

were reviewed by Dr. Pettegrew and myself. Once reviewed, applicants were either dismissed for not meeting the criteria or passed along for scoring from the search committee. A scoring rubric of one to four was used in the assessment process. A four represented high alignment while a one represented little alignment to the existing vision and values. A total of 15 applicants were presented to the search committee for scoring, with a total of five applicants being moved forward for interviews. The thoroughness of the search process combined with healthy pacing and adequate time given for individual and group discernment allowed for deep trust to be created internal and external to the team.

The foundation of trust began with the existing relationship between Dr. Pettegrew and me. The search committee, the department (Church and Ministry Leadership—CML), applicants, and administration all took conscious and subconscious cues on trust from the relationship formed between the Chair of CML and the outgoing Director of the PhD in Leadership program. Trust was further built and displayed by the commitment, “If we don’t fully agree on any one candidate, then we will pause or hold off for further discernment before moving forward.” This particular commitment was valued and lived out multiple times throughout this 14-month process.

Unique to this search was the vetting and relationship care needed for multiple nationally known leaders, who were not ultimately considered for the position. Relationship care included confidentiality, the avoidance of disruption on current organizational partnerships and maintaining a high level of truth telling without offense. During the 14-month search process, multiple relationship triangles were navigated external to the search committee. In each particular case, the triangle or action of triangulation was reported to Dr. Pettegrew or me, communicated to the search committee team, then ultimately confronted by the search committee chair. This simple process of honesty, trust and follow through created space for emotionally healthy power transfer (Morse, 122).

An additional pause took place six months into the search process due to a health issue and subsequent hospitalization centered around myself. The search during this time was placed

on hold, allowing for additional discernment on existing candidates as well as giving space for additional applications to be received. Though this time was not planned, in hindsight it became a strength for additional discernment and a natural space allowing for those candidates who embodied differing values to remove their applications.

In the summer of 2016, a reconvening of the search took place. During this unintended healthcare pause an additional applicant emerged who embodied CML vision and values. This applicant displayed significant alignment and seemed to process a high level of emotional intelligence and health. Over the following months, Dr. Gushiken interviewed with nine different stakeholder individuals and groups. Each group, independently from the other, confirmed alignment, emotional health, and key traits needed for the next director of PhD in leadership studies.

Once hired, a plan for healthy transition was created. This plan included a geographical move from the Chicago to Pennsylvania, a church/pastor transition, and a power knowledge transfer between the outgoing and incoming PhD Director. Due to a significant move as well as church transition, space was provided for Dr. Gushiken to work remotely during the spring of 2017. This accommodation also allowed for healthy formational transitions for Dr. Gushiken's church, spouse, and children. During this first six months of transition, both Dr. Pettegrew and myself met consistently with Dr. Gushiken to provide adequate support for transition. Dr. Pettegrew provided all the necessary knowledge and connections related to the PhD in Leadership program to Dr. Gushiken, while I provided formational support, the broader context of CML mission, vision, values, and a sponsorship of making my influence and networks available to Dr. Gushiken for seamless transition within the LBC|Capital community. During this time there was also a high commitment of caring for Dr. Pettegrew as he transitioned towards retirement. The commitment to care for all involved allowed for healthy transition to happen on all fronts, not just those related to the successful leadership transfer with this position.

KEY PRINCIPLES TO A SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Leadership transition is a critical aspect of any

organization. Institutions of higher education are not immune from such change. Recent research indicates the likely rise in job turnover at colleges and institutions, despite the decline in full-time academic and administrative positions (Olson, 2015, p. 141). Numerous studies have explored the reasons and nature of turnover among faculty and administrators (Jo, 2008, p. 568). Yet, little research has been conducted on the components of a healthy transition amongst administrators at institutions of higher education. This article has sought to contribute to this literature gap by presenting a narrative approach to a leadership transition while connecting it to existing literature. This section seeks to offer some key principles that might benefit higher education institutions as they navigate key leadership transitions.

Discern the Nature of the Transition

As mentioned, each transition is unique. Transitions that are born out of a termination will be more difficult than one that is voluntary. Three specific considerations can be helpful to this discernment process. First, was the transition voluntary or involuntary? If involuntary, what led to the need for a transition, for example, moral failure or job performance? It is important to identify the reason for the transition to effectively plan for the ensuing process. Second, how significant is the position? Positions that involve a lot of clout and authority in the organization require a delicate and collective approach by communicating and engaging key stakeholders. The new person's success will largely depend on the perception of the larger organization. Understanding the nature of the position will aid it curating these endorsements. Third, what is the appropriate and anticipated timeline for the transition? For more significant positions, the process will be longer. Determining the length of the process will allow for better communication and reasonable expectations.

Transition Begins Before a Person is Hired

It is tempting to immediately post a job position. However, an effective transition involves evaluating the current position—strengths and weakness, adjustments, redefinition (Bond & Naughton, 2011, p. 167). Re-imaging a position can most effectively be accomplished if done so prior to a job posting. What is the future mission

and vision of this position, not simply its current one? What are the desired qualities to fulfill that mission and vision? Perhaps the qualities for the new person might be different than the previous leader based on the future mission and vision. As articulated in the narrative, Dr. Pettegrew determined that someone with more technological experience would be critical to the long-term viability and success of the program. Thus, the position was re-imagined in certain areas.

Authentic and Thorough Communication is Maintained Throughout the Process

Research on presidential transition at higher education institutions emphasized that oftentimes incoming presidents “were not always fully or properly informed during the recruitment process” resulting in “unanticipated challenges” (Gearin, 2017, p. 571). Communication should be ongoing to all stakeholders during the transition. It should include specifics about the timeline and process to the search committee and department but also to mission and vision to the larger institution. By authentically and thoroughly communicating the process, it cultivates excitement that will be given to the new person. Effective communication will directly contribute to the new person’s success. Therefore, communication should not simply be reduced to relaying details about the process but rather an intentional investment in the next person and the future of the position.

Intentional yet Surrendered Mentoring

The success of the transition at LBC|Capital was largely due to Dr. Pettegrew’s commitment to intentionally mentor Dr. Gushiken in a manner that did not primarily instruct but rather offer assistance. He created space for him to familiarize himself with the role and develop in it. Dr. Pettegrew allowed for him to bring his unique personality to the position as well as his strengths. In other words, the mentoring was directed towards encouraging the new person as a leader for that position not cloning himself in a specific image of what the position requires. In this sense, it involved a surrendering—that the new person could approach the program very differently while also being successful. It involves a releasing of the position. This principle is essential if the institution intends to maintain an overlap from one leader to the next. The benefit to this mentoring approach is it allows

for the new person to access the past through the previous leader which will effectively inform any new direction for the program. Research has indicated that organizations typically suffer when the outgoing leader does not support or encourage the incoming leader (Stewart, 2016, p. 53).

RECOMMENDATIONS TO A SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Leadership transitions are unique to each higher education institutions depending on organizational size, geographic location, nature of the position, governance style, and individual personalities. The authors recognize that it would be impossible to offer recommendations that would be applicable to each situation. However, in light of this leadership transition, several recommendations are offered with the recognition that they will have to be contextualized to each setting.

Develop a Succession Plan

Institutions should proactively develop a succession plan, particularly for leaders. Oftentimes, transition plans are reactionary, quickly formed and defined based on a need to fill a position resulting in unnecessary expense and disruption (Berns & Klarner, 2017, p. 84). In such cases, little attention is given to re-imaging the position, mission and vision, and healthy handoff of a position from the giver to the receiver. Organizations should reflectively strategize transitions, especially as these situations near. A general succession plan could include but not limited to a rough timeline, preferred communication and interaction between the giver and the receiver, financial commitment to provide overlap between the leaders during the transition, and the description of healthy characteristics that can govern this time. As a transition becomes a possibility this plan could be consulted and refined to the unique situation. Given, it is impossible to fully anticipate every transition. Specifically, unhealthy transitions rarely afford the opportunity to develop a succession plan. They are abrupt and unexpected. However, even in these cases, a general succession plan could be in place that can be followed. It is quite possible such considerations could alleviate the stress and upheaval an unhealthy transition produces. In all situations, the transition plan should be communicated to all key stakeholders, including the new person assuming the position.

Involve the Outgoing Person Through the Transition

If possible, it would be beneficial to include the outgoing person in the transition, including the search committee. By doing so, a continuity is established that could enhance the success of the person assuming the position. The person departing the position typically has the best vantage point by which to understand the position. This knowledge is invaluable when hiring the person and onboarding that person into the new position. Regarding the leadership transition at LBC|Capital, it worked to have the outgoing person involved because it was both voluntary and not controlled. A person who has a narrow perspective about how the position should be executed could be a detriment to the new person's development. Furthermore, such a mindset could prevent the hiring of a person that could take the position to the next level. Therefore, involving the outgoing person should be coupled with the aforementioned point about a clear succession plan in order to ensure there is openness to reimagining the position.

Once a new person is hired, the outgoing person should create space for the new person to settle into the position while also providing clear direction as to the specific responsibilities. Authentic and bi-directional communication can assist this by forging a relationship that views the future success of the position as paramount. A commitment to intentional yet surrendered mentoring can position the new person for success allowing the unique gifts and skills to be exercised. It is important for the outgoing person to begin fading as the new person finds their footing. In other words, there is an ongoing need to release the position by the giver to fully allow the receiver to embody the position. Hanging onto the role, particularly as a means to bolster one's identity, would hamper the person and the position.

Clear Expectations for the New Person

It is best to articulate mission and vision as well as expectations to the new person during the hiring phase, not once the position is offered. The hiring process is a bi-directional process as the committee is interviewing the candidate but also the applicant is examining the position. Holding back key aspects of the position, namely expectations, can lead to a disruptive transition. The person could become

frustrated by previously unspoken expectations. Being aware of essential aspects and responsibilities of the position will allow the person to adequately discern whether they are a good fit for the position. As well, it provides a roadmap for the transition, namely the relationship with the outgoing person, the timeline, and benchmarks in the first year. Clear and transparent communication is essential for a successful transition.

Involve the Organization

The new person does not simply fill a position; they enter an institution. Therefore, it is essential for key stakeholders in the organization to be involved in the process. Even if a position is reimagined for a different direction, it is essential to respect the past. Organizations find security in past protocols, processes, and perspective. The most effective way to reimagine a position is to respect the past as a foundation to chart a new direction. During the hiring process for the LBC|Capital position, Dr. Gushiken met with key stakeholders, the president and several vice-presidents in order to allow these individuals to ask questions and interact with him. Some of them did not technically have a vote in hiring the person; however, their input was valuable in the decision. Furthermore, by including key people in the process it allowed for a more successful transition once he began the position. Relationships had already begun, and familiarity was established. This step allowed for him to begin the position with institutional endorsement. Involving others in the organization confirms the research conducted by Gmelch (2000, p. 85).

It is also important to budget for the transition, particularly if an overlap between the two leaders is utilized. It is possible that the institution's finance team might be unwilling to pay for two people to overlap overseeing the same position. Thus, it is essential for clear mission and vision as well as the long-term benefits of such a decision be articulated in advance of the hire.

CONCLUSION

Leadership transition in higher education is inevitable; however, it does not need to be disruptive. Developing an intentional transition plan that honors the personalities of individuals involved, respects the organization, and articulates the mission and vision while allowing for a reimagining towards the future not only

positions the new person for success it also is an act of good stewardship. The new person will be more effectively on boarded without the lengthy learning period that typically accompanies new positions. Since leadership positions involve persons being overseen, an effective transition also propels others towards success. As a result, the entire team benefits. Institutions, to be effective, should carefully consider how best to intentionally transition from one leader to the next. If done effectively, it strengthens the new leader and the organization.

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