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# Interim Administration in Higher Education

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**Interim Administration in Higher Education**

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# Abstract

Higher education, like any other field, goes through constant change.  It is not uncommon to see constant changes in administration in institutions of higher education.  In many of these cases, an interim administration is hired to provide transition, stability, and time to find the best candidate to serve in a permanent capacity.  Research has indicated that leadership turnover in higher education is continual and is most often seen at the dean level.  During these times, well-prepared leaders assist in the smooth transition for the organization and help the interim candidate become a stronger leader.

In the Minnesota State system, there are currently few prescribed programs for incoming interim deans in higher education.  In this research, nine participants who fulfilled or were already in the role of interim dean were interviewed.  The goal of the study was to determine (research) the preparedness of the selected individuals for the interim dean role before or during their term as interim dean.

The findings of this research illustrate the need for formal training or career pathing prior to an individual taking on the role of interim dean.  Leadership opportunities and support must exist for individuals interested in pursuing a leadership role as a dean within the Minnesota State system.  This research discusses the common themes of formal mentorship programs, training in the day-to-day operations of university processes and procedures, leadership skills, and people management.

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**Chapter I: Introduction**

Higher education is in a constant state of development; thus, change, turmoil, and instability are often the norm (Smith & Hughey, 2006). One of the challenges often faced by those in the higher education system is the replacement of key administrators when they retire, change careers, or leave for another institution. Since turnover is inevitable for institutions, changes in leadership often occur (Jones, 2011), especially in senior-level leadership positions. Senior leadership turnover can often resemble a revolving door for both leaders and followers in which the leaders transition in and out of their leadership positions on a regular basis (Basinger, 2001). Trachtenberg (2008) stated that chief administrators in colleges and universities make up the smallest cohort of individuals within an organization but are the most visible and scrutinized. Leader stability is important in any organization. Institutions are facing increased senior leadership turnover, and it takes a substantial amount of time to find permanent leaders. These institutions can be expected to use interim appointments to manage and fulfill the responsibilities of the dean until a successor is named. Interim administrators play a critical role when time is needed for the selection of a qualified individual to fill the role of a permanent dean.

While there has been extensive research on leadership in higher education, very little attention has been given to interim leadership (Ondercin, 2009). Interim leadership often occurs in higher education, and limited research has examined the challenges of interim appointments (Goler, 2003). Most research has been conducted on business organizations and individuals in management positions. Friedman and Saul (1991) contended that good leadership indeed makes a difference in terms of organizational performance. Leaders establish direction, align others, and motivate and inspire their employees (Kotter, 1990). A gap in leadership can create a

"revolving door" and result in instability within the organization. A smooth transition from an interim dean to a permanent dean helps others within the organization cope with the movement of the leadership.

Interim leadership can be a quick and convenient option for institutions to bridge the gap between permanent leadership positions (Gilmore, 1988), especially in cases of unplanned turnover. Deaths, leaves of absence, and unexpected retirement are just a few reasons that unexpected turnover occurs. Short notice and lack of preparation can create a difficult transition for a staff member or faculty member to an interim dean position. Mundt (2004) found that individuals serving in an interim role often have no time to plan, are given no training for the position and little to no information from the predecessor, and lack the ability to prepare either personally or professionally.

Corporate America has had a longstanding tradition of succession planning, talent management, and leadership training to ensure a pipeline of ready leaders to fill its management and executive ranks (Gonzalez, 2010; Luna, 2012). Colleges and universities, however, do not as readily embrace campus leadership programs for faculty and staff (McDade, 2009; Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). Rather, as faculty prove themselves to be successful in teaching, research, and scholarly work, they often move into leadership roles without being fully prepared (Mundt, 2004). This occurs because existing faculty development programs at the institutional level generally emphasize other skills over leadership development as a goal or activity (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002) and thus do not prepare faculty for interim leadership roles.

There are a variety of ways to utilize an interim dean. In some situations, the interim replacing the current dean is an internal administrator or faculty member.  The faculty member, in many of these cases, has very little experience in an administrative role.  Opportunities do exist for an individual to become a committee or department chair where they can gain experience in a leadership role.  Mundt (2004) stated that this lack of experience and preparedness can create dysfunction within the organization.  Another option for institutions is succession planning, which is a purposeful attempt to develop and promote talent and knowledge from within (Rothwell, 2010).  Unexpected leadership turnover may result in an underprepared leader due to their lack of training or experience (Mooney, Semadeni, & Kesner, 2013) and be an unsuccessful move by the institution.  Defining success from the perspective of the stakeholder hinges on the organizational environment the leader creates, the perceptions of their goal achievement, and the lack of internal organizational problems (Birnbaum, 1988; Dressel, 1981; Gilmore, 1990; Hughey, 1997; McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990; Pounder, 2001).

## Statement of the Problem

Faculty members play an important role in providing leadership when they fill interim dean roles, and their preparation for these critical roles can have a positive or negative impact on the institutions they serve.  The purpose of this study is to explore the level of preparedness and gain an understanding of the support and professional development opportunities offered to interim deans within four-year universities in the Minnesota State system.  This system is the fourth-largest system of state colleges and universities in the United States, comprised of seven universities and 30 colleges on 54 campuses throughout the state. This unique system, which has many moving parts and challenges, provides higher education to more than 375,000 students

each year.  In the 2017-2018 academic year, 24% of deans within this state system were interims (Minnesota State Colleges, 2018), which created an urgency to gain a greater understanding of the impacts of interim administration in terms of preparing and supporting this population of temporary leaders.

Research has rarely focused exclusively on interim leadership in higher education (Ondercin, 2009).  This study attempts to add to the limited research and knowledge regarding the need for interim preparedness, the support that interims need as they serve as leaders in higher education, and the opportunity to assist individuals who are transitioning into an interim leadership role.  This research looks into how well-prepared interims are moving into an administrative role and what skills they feel are needed to make the successful transition and for them be effective in their role as an interim dean.

## Description and Scope of the Research

There is a lack of research and understanding regarding the journey to and the impact of interim leadership within universities.  This study explores interim dean leadership in the Minnesota State system and provides an understanding of how interim leaders can be prepared or developed to successfully fill the role.  This research identifies ways for a smooth and more effective transition to occur between the exiting of an administrator and the appointment of an interim dean.

One of the challenges within this particular state-run system is the "revolving door" through which deans are constantly entering and exiting.  Proper planning for leadership replacements is critical to the stability of an organization, and utilization of interim leadership is

an important part of this process. These consequences can range from the disruption of day-to-day activities to a halt in the initiatives or strategic planning of the college or university.

This study used a qualitative research method, utilizing interviews with nine current or former interim deans. The interviews took place at four of the four-year universities in the Minnesota State system. The similarities of the institutions are important, as they helped support the findings of the research. These interviews focused on each participant's experience working as an interim dean, determining whether there was a pattern in terms of leadership preparation and whether the participants were adequately trained for the leadership position. Due to the large pool of interims in higher education institutions, this research could benefit the hiring process of interims and shed light on how well-prepared interims are as they move into the interim role. This research could also aid future professional development programs and training for interims. Upon completion of my research, I recommend how to prepare faculty members to serve in an interim leadership role. Because there are no prescribed programs throughout many higher education institutions, understanding how well-prepared interims are for the position can help universities develop processes to better support their interims.

## Research Questions

The following three questions guided this research:

1. Why do faculty members choose to become interim deans?

2. What professional and personal challenges were experienced as the interim transitioned through the interim appointment?

3. What institutional support strategies should be considered for interim deans as they transition through the interim appointment?

The findings of this research may provide guidance for higher education institutions to successfully develop and train individuals to fill interim dean roles.

## Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it will further the research of interim administrative leadership by providing institutions with data for developing a structured training and development program for individuals interested in or appointed to fulfill the role of interim dean. This study focused on the Minnesota State system due to the large presence of interims at its four-year universities. Currently, 18 of the 75 dean roles within the Minnesota State system are being fulfilled by an interim (Minnesota State Colleges, 2018). The limited research on interims and the significant use of interims in higher education has created the need for the development of individuals to ensure a successful tenure in the role of interim. This study provides data from interim deans who are currently or have within the last five years served in an interim dean role in the Minnesota State system. Institutions can take this information to develop a process of incorporating programs and protocols into their appointment practices of interim administrators to ensure that the interims are prepared and supported in their roles. This will create a better understanding of what participants think others can do to better prepare and support them in this critical role in higher education institutions.

## Delimitations and Positioning

This study was limited to examining four-year universities within the Minnesota State system. There were no interviews at any two-year technical or community colleges within this state system, nor at private, proprietary, or land grant institutions. My positioning in this research has several implications. I am currently a faculty member at one of the Minnesota State

universities.  My experience with interim administrators and permanent administrators affected my interpretation of the interviews.  The questions were developed to attempt to eliminate these biases.  Additionally, the questions were open for interpretation but were specific enough to not interfere with my past experiences involving interim deans.  The university at which I am currently employed may have a different approach to interim support, development, and transitions, and I may, therefore, have made assumptions on other institutions' processes for their interims.  Additional biases are that I may have knowledge of an individual's previous tenure as an interim or that I may have heard reports about a specific interim administrator.  Lastly, my personal feelings regarding other institutions within the Minnesota State system created personal biases.  I have worked with other universities within the Minnesota State system and have drawn my own conclusions about other institutions.  To mitigate biases regarding other universities, my research did not analyze specific universities but rather the system as a whole.

## Summary

The utilization of interim administrators in higher education is not uncommon.  In the Minnesota State system, there are nearly three interim administrators per four-year university.  With such a high rate, it is critical for the organization to have proper preparation and support for interims as they transition into this role.  The complexity of higher education makes administrative duties difficult.  A smooth transition from one administrator to the next is vital to the stability of the institution.  In this study, participants described their experiences of being in the role of interim dean in an honest and forthcoming manner.

**Chapter II: Literature Review**

Leadership theories have long been a topic of interest in higher education. However, interest in leadership can be complicated by the fact that there is no agreeable definition of leadership itself. Stogdill (1974), in his leadership research, showed that there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have attempted to define it. In fact, according to Rost (1991), from 1900 to 1991, more than 200 definitions of leadership have been established. This research focused on the following definition of leadership: "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2013, p. 5). Accordingly, the definition of interim, for the purpose of this research, is defined as a short-term, planned, temporary assignment (Alewell, Bähring, & Thommes, 2005).

**Conceptual Framework**

Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) served as the general model for this study. However, in order to understand CLT, it is important to understand complex adaptive systems (CAS's). A CAS is defined as an open, evolutionary aggregate whose components are dynamically interrelated and cooperatively bonded by a common purpose (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Higher education is comprised of many moving and complex parts in which the individuals involved work toward a common goal, but this is also true of any organization. CLT as it relates to higher education is a framework for leadership that enables the learning, creative, and adaptive capacity of CAS's in knowledge-producing organizations or organizational units. The current higher education environment, the problems organizations are solving, and the interactions between organizations and individuals are more complex now than

they were in the previous century. In CLT leadership, when the organization is balanced for optimal innovation, leadership is conceptualized as distributed (Dooley & Lichtenstein, 2008; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Schwandt, 2008), and leaders play an influencing role rather than a controlling role (Plowman & Duchon, 2008). Leaders do not exert control over emergent outcomes but influence emergence through contextual conditions (Boal & Schultz, 2007; Marion, 2013; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Plowman et al., 2007; Schneider & Somers, 2006; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Leadership in CLT largely involves people throughout the organization fostering conditions that enable productive states to emerge (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001).

CLT provides an overarching framework that describes administrative leadership, adaptive leadership, and enabling leadership. This framework shows the entanglement among these three types of leadership and is influenced by CAS. Administrative leadership in CLT. Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) defined administrative leadership as the

> actions of individuals in formal managerial roles who plan and coordinate organizational activities (e.g., the bureaucratic function) . . . Administrative Leadership is a top down function based on authority and position, thus it possesses the power to make decisions for the organization. (p. 306)

Even with this administrative top-down system in place, the CLT also suggests that leaders consider the organization's need for creativity, learning, and adaptability, for its actions can have a significant impact on its members.

Adaptive leadership in CLT is defined as a dynamic process in which agentic adaptive leaders interact and engage with potential emerging complexity dynamics to produce adaptive

change for an organization (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). Often, leadership in CAS does not rely on formal structures (Schneider & Somers, 2006). This is the case with adaptive leadership, which is informal and necessarily contextual (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). Adaptive leadership seeks to produce a rich flow of information to enhance the organization's dynamic complexity processes; adaptive leadership does not seek to direct or motivate subordinates (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). Although an informal process, adaptive leadership is indeed leadership because it exercises intentional influence to create change and increase the viability of the organization (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009).

Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) defined enabling leadership as a process that serves to enable (catalyze) adaptive dynamics and help manage the entanglement between administrative and adaptive leadership. Enabling leadership produces internal methods for processing environmental demands and either enhances or suppresses dynamic processes, depending on the environmental stimulus (Marion, 2013). In cases where innovation is desirable, the leadership process should focus on speeding the emergence of distributed intelligence (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). When innovation is not desirable or should be slowed, enabling leadership should be focused on integrating local constraints (Lichtenstein & Plowman, 2009). Middle managers such as interim deans are often in a position to engage in enabling behaviors because of their access to resources and their direct involvement with faculty and staff. Enabling leadership manages the entanglement between administrative leadership and adaptive leadership by disseminating the innovative products of adaptive leadership both through the managerial system and externally (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The three categories of leadership work together to determine which creative outputs are moved throughout the bureaucratic structure (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

Complex leader theory leaders are multilevel in that anyone can engage in many of the leadership functions (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). Schneider and Somers (2006) stated that in CAS, leaders "frequently lead without authority and often do in a temporary capacity" (p. 356). An example of a temporary capacity would be the utilization of an interim dean. Complexity leadership can be defined as adaptive mechanisms developed by complex organizations in new conditions required by the information age rather than technical problems that the industrial age entails. Complexity leadership takes into consideration the fast-paced technological world that leadership faces. Leadership models based on classical management perspectives are mostly static models based on currently invalid remedies to yesterday's issues, and they are not flexible enough to offer alternative solutions to organizational problems in a chaotic environment (Baltaci & Balci, 2017).

**Challenges for Leadership Development in Higher Education**

Madsen (2012) suggested that leadership development is a critical component of society, specifically within human resource development. Defining competencies such as knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attributes is important for effective leadership and strengthening the probability of achieving desirable organizational outcomes. It also has practical implications that may prove useful (Smith & Wolverton, 2010). For instance, Rosser, Johnsrud, and Heck (2003) discussed effective leadership as having a "pertinent criterion when the evaluation purpose is to hold individuals accountable for certain types of results" (p. 4). Within the same discussion, Rosser et al. (2003) proposed that while evaluations should have a set of common criteria, defining effective leadership in higher education is challenging. Filan and Seagren (2003) suggested that "leadership at all levels in post-secondary education is complex and

multidimensional" (p. 21). Without identifiable and consistent evaluations, it is difficult for

higher education institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of a leader.

Day (2011) discussed that although succession planning is great for organizations, the

planning needs to be more in-depth than simply identifying those individuals who will be next in

line for a position. A planned program for these potential leaders is invaluable to the success of

the leader and their organization. Silzer (in Hollenbeck, McCall, & Silzer, 2006) stated that

leadership competency models are useful for gaining insight from "seasoned leaders" (p. 402), as

they are a stepping stone on which future leaders can start for development and evaluation

purposes. Another point that Silzer made in Hollenbeck et al. (2006) is that organizations can

utilize competencies in "linking leader behavior to the strategic directions and goals of the

institution" (p. 403). Most research would agree that leadership is complex and that effective

leadership should entail a comprehensive approach with regard to competencies. Hollenbeck et

al. (2006) supported this by stating that the "interactions between person-centered competencies

and situational variables lead to successful leadership outcomes" (p. 409). There must be a link

between the leader, goals, and direction of the institution.

A problem facing the field of higher education, specifically four-year institutions, is the

lack of training and preparation to support the success of their leaders in this complex arena.

According to Madsen (2010, 2012), higher education is constantly seeking prepared, qualified,

competent, effective, and ethical leaders to navigate schools into the future in various roles;

however, the field is lacking in candidates. Davis (2008) suggested that higher education could

"borrow" strategies from the corporate world for developing leaders to truly benefit colleges and

universities. Selingo (2006) stated that colleges lag behind the private sector in terms of finding

and developing leadership talent.  In general, companies do a better job than colleges in identifying visible career paths.

**Research relevant to the study.**

*The dean's role.*  The dean's role could be likened to a "linchpin" that fastens the different parts of the institution together so that the various operational units do not slide off the mission or the core values (Ankrah, 2007).  Wolverton , Gmelch, Montez, and Nies (2001) observed that "driven by academic discipline from below and constrained by budgetary concerns from above, college deans straddle a jittery enterprise whose members at once cling to tradition and toy with the notion of breaking out of the mold" (p. 1).  Wolverton et al. therefore concluded that deans

> serve two masters" (p. 1): on one hand, deans are expected to carry out the plans and decisions approved by the university's chief executive.  On the other, deans are expected to work in tandem with faculty whose loyalty may, at certain times, be to their professional interests rather than to the institution they serve. (p. 2)

Bryan (2011) cited the extensive study of the career paths of chief academic officers conducted by Abdul-Rahman in 1996.  This study indicated that more than 50% of deans who came to their position as dean "were deficient in experience and academic leadership.  They entered the vocation, having to learn their roles as they served.  This duality of learning and serving can create enough stress for the new dean to question the call" (p. 80).  Bryan (2011) agreed that some challenge deans, who transition from faculty to administrator, go from "solitary to social, focused to fragmented, autonomy to accountability, manuscripts to memoranda, private to public, professing to persuading, stability to mobility, and client to custodian" (p. 80).

The dean carries both the authority and the responsibility for the operation of their school or college as an organized unit within the broader institution. Thee authority and responsibility delegated to them are primarily vested in the president of the university by a governing board (Krahenbuhl, 2004, p. 19). They have the responsibility to manage the faculty, budget, and other resources within the school or college while supporting the initiatives of the university. Deans also have the responsibility of answering the needs and interests of students, staff, and parents, as well as external entities such as alumni, donors, and corporate organizations. Fagin (1997) claimed that to ensure success, the nature of a dean's job demands that they "go up, down, across, and out" (p. 97).

The complexity of a dean's role is supported by an executive summary from a Minnesota State system survey. This survey supported the need for additional competencies and abilities to (a) mediate and collaborate effectively, (b) exhibit entrepreneurial and innovative thinking, and (c) successfully manage budget and fiscal issues (Minnesota State Colleges, 2010). Institutions can provide a job description that outlines the roles and responsibilities of a dean. Hierarchical variations often exist between institutions, so it is important for the interim to know the organizational structure of the relevant institution.

**Higher education leadership.** Higher education has major hurdles to overcome in the future with respect to leadership roles in administration. Research has indicated that senior leadership turnover is frequent in higher education institutions (Betts, Urias, & Betts, 2009; Everley, 1994; Monks, 2012; Nehls, 2012; Song & Hartley, 2012). In addition to increased turnover, employment for post-secondary education administrators is projected to grow 10% from 2016 to 2026, faster than the average of all other occupations (Song & Hartley, 2012). In

comparison, a 3% increase is projected for management positions in the private sector. Additionally, there is no process for a faculty member to move into a leadership role; therefore, there is no way to determine whether a current interim has the knowledge and ability to provide stability and leadership to and within the organization. Since interim leaders are key players in maintaining stability, facilitating change, and providing a transitional pathway for permanent leadership (Mundt, 2004), it is important for short-term leaders to clearly understand their purpose (Mooney et al., 2013). Davis (2008) stated that first, they encourage individuals to accept the role of department chair, then dean, then provost or vice president of academic affairs, then president. This unplanned path that leaders follow is the result of high turnover in administrative positions in higher education. While there is a need to recruit and prepare administrators to fill impending vacancies, there is a shortage of qualified replacements (Fain, 2008; Leubsdorf, 2006; Selingo, 2006).

In 1981, Dressel studied the work of higher education administrators and concluded that their work is not only complex but also demanding. Challenges and opportunities exist simultaneously in the administrative and leadership ranks of our colleges and universities (Eddy, 2006). Filan and Seagren (2003) deduced that "leadership at all levels in post-secondary education is complex and multi-dimensional" (p. 21). In addition, mid-level leadership often encompasses many functions and roles, making it hard to define a single role. Individuals who lead colleges and universities are tasked with managing numerous resources and stakeholders. Higher education is in a constant state of development; thus, change, turmoil, and instability are often the norm. College and university executives need to understand the complex nature of the higher education environment in order to lead it (Bess & Dee, 2008; Smith & Hughey, 2006).

Effective management of these resources leads to fiscal and educational accountability, as well as institutional credibility, financial stability, long-term planning, and support of strategic initiatives.

Multiple theories on leadership have developed over the years. In the private sector, theories are varied on the positions of company presidents, executives, and middle management. In higher education, studies have looked at presidents, directors, chairpersons, and non-academic chains of command, which include student affairs, fiscal affairs, development, administrative services, and many other departments that have leadership roles within their departments. Leadership effectiveness in any context is complex. Trachtenberg, Kauvar, and Bogue (2013) noted that leaders in higher education have an additional requirement for leadership effectiveness and success: an understanding of the nature of the academic enterprise, which includes the ever-changing dynamics of shared governance. "A college or university must be business-like in many of its functions, but it is not a business" (Trachtenberg et al., 2013, p. 2). This one issue alone is often debated in higher education circles, particularly regarding the role and function of administrators versus faculty. Ginsberg (2011) stated that "most administrators are not especially talented, nor are most especially qualified for their leadership positions" (p. 17). He noted that the ranks of professors in administrative positions are dwindling and gradually being taken over by professional administrators who lack an understanding of the character and purpose of the university. Ginsberg summarized one of the major philosophical issues in shared governance: "Administration thinks teaching serves the university, not the converse" (p. 170). When non-academic professionals are in leadership roles in higher education, it may be difficult for them to grasp the complexity and culture of higher education.

The symbolic role of a leader is important in the higher education setting. The dean of a college has the role and responsibility to follow university visions and is a symbol to the faculty of carrying out the vision. For example, if an administrator must make a decision that is not favorable within their group, he or she may rely on the institution's goals or strategic plans to help support that decision (Astin & Astin, 2000). Those who might be displeased by the president's actions will probably not be very surprised that the president is merely being consistent with the strategic plan. Further, a president who is true to him or herself deeply feels values, and the sense of institutional mission is likely to generate a certain amount of respect, even among those who might disagree with those actions or policies. In some instances, the symbolic role can be more effective than following some of the policies and practices that are in place. One can see that if there is a strong feeling from the group, it would be easy for an administrator to make a decision without controversy or push back.

> An organizational saga is a powerful means of unity in the formal place. It makes links across internal divisions and organizational boundaries as internal and external groups share their common belief. With deep emotional commitment, believers define themselves by their organizational affiliation, and in their bond to other believers, they share an intense sense of the unique. (Clark, 1972, p. 176)

The list of functional roles of a higher education administrator is overwhelming. Some of these functions are fundraising, public relations, consultation, budgeting, strategic planning, developing a mission, articulating a "vision," crisis management, mediation, staff development, and consensus-building (Jackson, 2018). Powers and Maghroori (2006) added to this list managing a huge budget, handling personnel matters for hundreds of well-trained people,

coordinating the activities of a complex array of academic and support programs, and guiding

long-term planning.  Walker and Walker (1998) distinguished between needing to know how

higher education administration worked in the past and how it works today.  He focused on this

because higher education is peculiar.

This peculiarity is what makes the study of leadership in higher education so difficult.

The study of leadership in colleges and universities is problematic because of the dual control

systems, conflicts between professional and administrative authorities, unclear goals, and other

special properties of normative, professional organizations (Ondercin, 2009).  Leadership in

higher education can be examined from the perspective of leadership theories and organizational

frames; however, an explicit conceptual orientation is absent in many works (Bensimon, 1989a,

1989b).  The leadership theories and organizational frames that Bensimon ( 1989a, 1989b) stated

are beneficial for research do not take into account the complex nature of higher education and

how to prepare leadership in this setting.  Many of the leadership theories that have been

presented in previous research, while useful, are limited.  They are based on the traits and skills

of the leader but fall short of showing what an effective leader in higher education looks like and

how one can prepare to be a leader.  The number of leadership traits and characteristics appears

endless.  Northouse (2013) pointed out that from 1948 to 2004, 45 different traits and

characteristics were developed.  With many of the changes that have arisen in higher education,

the traits and characteristics of leadership have also changed.  The literature has also noted the

increasing complexity of the administrative role, particularly regarding managing relationships

with key constituents and leading others.  "The ability to develop collaborative, constructive

working relationships with a wide range of stakeholders—board members, faculty, staff, alumni,

students, donors, the community, and political leaders—is essential" (Trachtenberg et al., 2013, p. 12).

**Interim administrative leadership in higher education**.  A copious focus has been placed on the situation and circumstances of an administrator who is hired into an interim dean role.  Various situations can change the effectiveness of their leadership during their tenure as interim dean.  One such situation is that many interim administrators come from the classroom and are not prepared for, nor have previous experience in, administrative leadership in a higher educational setting.  Unforeseen circumstances involving death, quick removal, departure for new employment, or termination create instant vacancies and force presidents to appoint interims who have little or no experience in a leadership role.  This abrupt appointment can create dysfunction and uncertainty for faculty and other individuals within the college.

Other research has also confirmed that leadership turnover rates among senior leadership in higher education are on the rise (Chapman, Chapman, & Lostetter, 1988; Gilmore, 1990; McLaughlin & Riesman, 1990).  Betts et al. (2009) projected that starting in 2014, there would be a 50% turnover in higher education senior administrators.  With 7,006 accredited higher education institutions in the United States (Klein & Salk, 2013), considerable turnover has been forecasted, and a leadership shortage in higher education is on the horizon (Betts et al., 2009).  Song and Hartley (2012) supported this projection through their research of independent college presidents who have confirmed their intent to leave their presidencies within five years.  Furthermore, Nehls (2012) agreed that president turnover can be expected due to impending retirements.  Only 9% of American college presidents are under the age of 50, and the average age of a president has risen from 52 to over 60 in the last 20 years (Nehls, 2012).  The increase

of presidential turnover due to retirement is further supported by Song and Hartley's findings, which determined that 79% of community college presidents would retire by 2012, with a prediction of 84% retiring by 2016 (Song & Hartley, 2012).

**Permanence of the position.**  Another circumstance that affects leadership effectiveness is whether the interim is going to be a candidate for a permanent position.  For example, Mundt (2004) stated that if administrators are planning on going back to the classroom, they "must have a strategy for leaving the position and reintroducing themselves to their colleagues as they return to their faculty position with all the baggage they acquired during their role in the interim position" (p. 501).  This could have a large impact on the interim's decision-making and their style of leadership in the position**.**  The decision to appoint an interim leader often depends on the circumstances that led to the departure of the former leader (Farquhar, 1995).  Precipitating circumstances dictate the terms of the interim leader's employment (Farquhar, 1995; Goler, 2003; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson, Heising, & Rousseau, 2001) and have a major influence on the charge and goals of the interim leader (Farquhar, 1995).

**Planned or unplanned administrative vacancy.**  Executive departure can be planned or unplanned.  Planned vacancies occur when an individual accepts another position, retires, or voluntarily resigns.  These planned departures usually come with a formal announcement, giving the organization time to plan.  In some circumstances, succession planning within the university may exist, but this is not always the case.  Unplanned vacancies occur when an individual leaves unexpectedly because they are terminated, pass away, or resign unexpectedly (Farquhar, 1991).  Unplanned and unexpected leadership departures create a crisis within the organization, requiring an interim or successor to first assess the situation and climate before making any

decisions or assuming the role. Planned exits may create less of a crisis within the organization; however, in an unplanned situation, the interim will need to spend time stabilizing the uncertain environment (Donaldson, 1999; Farquhar, 1995; Goss & Bridson, 1998). In either case, stabilizing the environment provides the interim leader with an opportunity to change the organizational culture (Goss & Bridson, 1998), reassess the administrative structure, and clarify the organizational values and purposes (Goler, 2003). Having been charged with stabilizing a crisis and/or the environment, the term of the interim appointment often has specific goals designated by the hiring official (Chapman et al., 1988; Farquhar, 1991; Farquhar, 1995; Goler, 2003; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2001). However, the ultimate goal of any interim leader is to manage the organizational leadership succession, with the intent of preparing both the organization and the individuals within it for the permanent leadership appointment (Chapman et al., 1988; Farquhar, 1991, 1995; Goler, 2003; Inkson et al., 2001). With specific goals that further the organization and prepare those within for leadership succession, the interim serves as more than a placeholder (Farquhar, 1995; Goss & Bridson, 1998; Inkson et al., 2001). Chapman et al. (1988) asserted that the interim "is not made to act out, but to perform the regular responsibilities on the interim basis" (p. 84). However, Chapman et al. and Goler (2003) emphasized that the interim should have the full authority of the permanent leader in order to be effective and reduce role ambiguity.

**Internally appointed interims.** Internal interim leaders are typically appointed from internal employees who are usually already serving as a fixture in an authoritative group within the area that experienced the leadership turnover (Browning & McNamee, 2012) because it is typically less disruptive to do so for an organization (Ferrin & Plank, 2002). However, other

employees from within the organization, such as board members, consultants, or other senior level staff, can be appointed as internal interim leaders as well (Gilmore, 1988). The advantage of internal interim leadership appointments comes from having a solid foundation of internal knowledge (Everley, 1994; Mooney et al., 2013; Topper, 2009), familiarity with campus communities (Everley, 1994), and the ability to handle the day-to-day operations without a major learning curve (Topper, 2009).

Since appointing a person into an interim position can be the result of a difficult situation, decisions to appoint an internal employee can be quick and conveniently made by the appointing authorities, with little regard to long-term issues (Gilmore, 1988). Quick decisions to hire an interim leader, or to accept an interim appointment, may lead to difficulties in the future for the individual and the institution (Alley, 2005) because when an internal employee is utilized to serve in an interim leadership position, a gap is created in the fulfillment of lower-ranked organizational tasks (Draper & McMichael, 2002). As a result, and as a characteristic of the neutral zone of Bridges' (2004) Transition Theory Model, internal appointments of interim leaders can cause difficulty for the individual appointed in meeting the needs of the organization when uncertain of their role and trying to balance dual positions.

**Externally appointed interims.** External interim leaders, according to Ballinger and Marcel (2010), are individuals (who may or may not have held a similar role elsewhere) who are appointed to interim positions and have not previously operated as an administrator within the organization. Although Everley's (1994) study of 79 interim college presidents concluded that 9% had been appointed from outside of the institution, the researcher determined that external interim leadership prevents disruption to the administrative hierarchy by not appointing an

internal interim leader and thereby creating an opening elsewhere in the organization. Further

literature has also suggested that external interim leaders can be more objective than internal

appointees (Everley, 1994), can arrive without attachment to the current staff and organization

and can make changes if needed (Medeiros, 2010; Mooney et al., 2013; Morris, 2012; Mundt,

2004; Topper, 2009). Since externally appointed interim leaders lack a cultural understanding of

the organization (Browning & Boys, 2015), it is important for them to understand their purpose

in serving as an interim leader. Although external interim leaders lack organizational

identification, external interim appointments allow an organization to select from a larger pool of

prepared candidates to find a specific skill set that is needed at the time of the transition that the

internal employees lack (Browning & Boys, 2015; Everley, 1994). External interim leaders

typically have proven track records (Duncan, 2006), the latitude to make necessary changes—no

matter how unpopular—and the ability to walk away once the permanent director is hired

(Morris, 2012). Even though an external interim director serves as a bridge to the permanent

position (Browning & McNamee, 2012), bringing someone in externally can result in

unfamiliarity and disruption and be impractical for an organization when stability is being sought

(Everley, 1994).

  **Transition.** The transition from permanent administrator to interim can have an impact

on the success of the interim's time as a leader. Farquhar (1991) discussed four dimensions

important to studying all levels of a transitional administration:

   (a) how the director departed the agency and the impact on the employees of that

   departure, (b) whether the staff have a high interest in being involved in the search

   process for the new director, (c) the interim administrator's events/actions and how the

interim is "a buffer between permanent administrations, allowing the organization to

work through the process of executive transition," and (d) the transition to a new director

entering the agency. (p. 203)

Although this study was conducted on a legal service program, the program shares key

characteristics with other public agencies; for instance, the rules, regulations, and procedures that

govern organizational processes are also often followed at higher educational institutions.  The

impact on an organization with an interim leader is an important aspect to look at in a study, but

it does not take into consideration the preparation for the position and the leadership style of the

interim.  In 1997, Sidoti utilized a comparative case study research method to analyze Dr. John

B. Davis's leadership and why he was asked to serve in the interim role in three educational

institutions and one civic organization (Sidoti, 1997).  In this study, Sidoti determined that

communication as an interim administrator is key to the success of their term.  The previous

administrator lacked communicating skills; thus, Dr. Davis made that a priority.  This type of

transition requires the interim to focus on the shortcomings of the previous administrator.  In

2013, Northouse stated that conceptual skills require leaders to be comfortable talking about

ideas that shape an organization and the intricacies involved.  This empirical study suggests that

certain skills, such as communication, are needed for an effective transition and an effective

interim.

      **Transition time.**  Austin and Gilmore (1993) stated that too often, the literature focuses

on the actual sitting time of the permanent leadership and not the transition time; thus, the

challenge is the brevity of the length of the interim's position.  According to Austin and Gilmore,

the majority of leadership studies have considered the middle of the administrator's tenure.

Bridges (1986), Gilmore (1990), and Farquhar (1991) considered the periods during the

leadership transition and succession, including the impact of the exit of the previous leader and

the entry of the incoming leader on the individual and the organization.  Gilmore (1990) stated

that a well-managed leadership transition advances the purposefulness and sustainability of an

organization.  Although this period often creates uncertainty among the individuals within an

organization, the interregnum period presents an opportunity for organizational improvement.

This could create time to reflect on the goals and missions of the institution.  Gilmore (1990)

stated that with the right leader, the organizational climate created might not only decrease

uncertainty but also increase productivity and ease individual anxieties.  Gilmore (1990)

discovered that in the initial phases of integrating into an organization, a leader experiences two

major phases: joining and building the team.  During the joining phase, the leader disengages

from their previous job, works through comparisons to the predecessor, and begins to develop

relationships with the existing staff.  At the same time, the staff also disengage from the previous

leadership.  When the staff are introduced to the new leadership and simultaneously break away

from the former leadership, they may experience a wide range of emotions, including guilt, loss,

relief, hope, and anxiety (Farquhar, 1991; Gilmore, 1990).

     **Institutional culture.**  Before moving forward, a leader must gain a sense of the culture

that was developed by the previous leader and create a plan.  After developing initial

relationships and becoming acquainted with the new organization, the leader begins building the

team.  According to Gilmore (1990), a leader will quickly assess the skills and competencies of

the staff in order to take an "inventory of talent" (p. 139). Proficiency and attention to the early

phases of leadership change allow a leader to become more skilled in transition management, a

critical requirement of today's leaders (Gilmore, 1990).  While Gilmore (1990) focused more on the initial phases of the leadership transition, Austin and Gilmore (1993), Bridges (1986), and Farquhar (1991) considered the impact of the departure of the previous leader during leadership transitions.  One scenario is overlooked many times: the departure of the previous leader.  This provides insight into the new leader so that they can manage individual reactions, facilitate acceptance, and decrease the likelihood of reductions occurring in their employees' productivity.  Bridges states that circumstances change more quickly than people do; therefore, a leader must pay attention to how the organization and the individuals within the institution plan for and react to change and transition.

## Interim Administration in the Business Sector

Research in higher education has identified several roles of interim leaders.  It is also worth looking at the roles identified for interim leaders in the business sector, because that is where the concept of interim leadership originated.  Whether interim leadership occurs at a higher educational or business entity, the dynamics of temporary leadership are set by the needs of the organization (Mooney et al., 2013) and can be applied in both settings.  It is important to consider that interims are a staple in many industries (Ballinger & Marcel, 2010; Mundt, 2004).  Human capital can be one of the greatest assets of a firm, and good leadership can help to obtain and keep employees.  Human resource management (HRM) practices are directly related to a firm's productivity, quality, and financial performance (MacDuffie, 1995).

Interim managerial positions are very common in the workplace.  For example, Bloemers (2003) reported that 20% of German companies had experience with interim managers.  The UK and the Netherlands are well known for their use of interim management.  In the Netherlands, it

is estimated that up to 40,000 interim managers and about 60% of Dutch companies have at least

once experienced interim manager (Tiberius, 2004). The CEOs of many major companies have

had previous interim titles. Steve Jobs and Ed Whitacre Jr. were familiar players on the

corporate landscape, but beyond visibility, the former Apple and General Motors leaders shared

another element in their professional pedigrees: each had held the title of interim CEO prior to

his permanent position at the organizational helm (Browning & McNamee, 2012). Many

corporate interims are hired for middle- to senior-level management positions in order to provide

a missing skill (Goss & Bridson, 1998), coordinate an organizational restructuring, provide

additional labor during peak times, or launch a new company initiative or product (Donaldson,

1999). Additionally, businesses hire interims as resources in cases of "acquisition, disposal and

turn-around" (Donaldson, 1999, p. 2). Under these conditions, the individual may have a

tremendous impact on the success of the company or organization. Looking at the research of

interim business leaders presents different perspectives of the roles, responsibilities, and styles of

the leader. Some studies cite temporary leaders as caretakers who perceive their role as

maintaining stability rather than wielding power (Farquhar, 1991). There have been CEO

interims at various corporations, such as Denny's Corp., Guardian Media Group, Proctor and

Gamble, Omnicare Inc., and Yahoo.

 Mooney et al. (2013) revealed six different types of interim CEOs that vary in the

responsibilities according to the type of leadership that is needed at the time and are comparable

to interim roles in higher education. The roles presented by Mooney et al. (2013) are (a) seat

warmers, (b) contenders, (c) groomers, (d) marketers, (e) fixers, and (f) cleaners. The seat

warmer role manages the day-to-day operations of an organization until a replacement can be

found. In higher education, this role provides stability of the day-to-day operations of the complex university system. This person is not concerned with the culture or the broader outcomes of the college. The contender role operates as a permanent CEO replacement and is a viable candidate for the permanent position. Many times in higher education, this is what occurs. The interim dean is looking to be the permanent dean and is preparing him or herself for that position. The groomer role continues to lead the organization while they train an internal candidate to become the future CEO. Being a mentor for a future permanent dean helps with the transition in a higher education institution. The marketer role highlights the organization and capitalizes on the company's success. In higher education, this person can be comparable to the placeholder, as the institution is running well, and there is no need for change. The fixer tries to avoid financial distress by turning poorly performing companies around. This is a significant role, as it relates to higher education in that the interim dean can provide the university with insight on how to alleviate some of its financial problems. The cleaner role improves organizational focus by reorganizing the company's portfolio. Providing the college with a clear vision, mission, and strategic plan, an interim can help with the future success of the college. The Mooney et al. (2013) explanation of the roles of business interim leadership has some significant parallels to higher education interim leadership.

Farquhar (1991) researched 43 legal service programs. The programs were composed of a variety of staff members, from lawyers to paraprofessionals and support staff to administrators. This study focused on four key dimensions: (a) the incumbent's departure, (b) the research process, (c) the events of the interregnum, and (d) the new executive's entry. These four areas of focus were used because case studies and research on executive succession have used these key

dimensions (Gabarro, 1987; Gilmore, 1988; Gordon & Rosen, 1981; Kohler & Strauss, 1983).

Each of these areas can affect whether the interim leader will be successful.  For example, an

incumbent's departure may have an emotional effect on the employees.  The departure of an

administrator due to their death can be much more difficult than if the departure was due to a

firing.  The death of an administrator could trigger employees to remember all the great ideas

and initiatives the leader accomplished, making it impossible for the interim to meet these

standards.  On the other hand, if the administrator was fired, the interim may need to make major

changes to get the organization on track.  Farquhar (1991) stated, "the present study suggests that

incoming executives who understand the history and impact of the transitional administration can

build on the momentum created by the brief public exposure of top-level decision making and

communications during the interregnum" (p. 209).

One thing that most researchers agree on is that the decision-making of the interim is

usually focused on short-term results, not long-term results.  The Browning and McNamee

(2012) study suggested that interim leaders' personal perceptions and interactions with

colleagues and stakeholders critically influence their leadership styles and theories.  Browning

and McNamee's analysis used five distinct sense-making processes.  The first of these is dutiful,

which can be characterized by a sense of obligation but also willingness to take on the role.

Traditional is similar to dutiful, except the interim does not feel obligated to take the position;

rather, they are actively seeking the position.  Aspiring is characterized by the sense of simply

filling in for the position and not being regarded as the leader.  Self-conscious is very similar to

aspiring, except the leader feels a sense of empowerment and that they can make decisions even

though the position is only temporary.  The last of Browning and McNamee's sense-making

processes is restrained.  In this process, the leader feels like they should not and cannot make any major decisions for the organization.

## Organizational Impact of Interim Leadership

Interim leadership impacts an organization in many ways.  Since interim leaders can serve during volatile, tension-filled periods of transition, their adjustment to, and performance in, the temporary role has critical implications for the organization as a whole (Browning & Boys, 2015; Browning & McNamee, 2012).  Researchers agree that the behaviors of temporary leaders can have long-lasting consequences for the entire organization (Browning & Boys, 2015; Browning & McNamee, 2012; Everley, 1994).  When viewed through Bolman and Deal's (2017) human resources framework, interim leadership not only contributes to the sense of uncertainty regarding the future leadership of an organization but can also provide time for the organization to determine the appropriate person for the permanent position.  For example, in a case study of two community college interim presidents, Thompson, Cooper, and Ebbers (2012) found four shared themes that impacted the organization from the experiences of those serving in an interim president capacity at a large, urban institution and a small, rural institution.  The common themes that emerged from the findings included the organizational need of interim leaders to (a) repair institutional morale, (b) establish effective relationships, (c) facilitate strategic planning, and (d) manage fiscal control.  Even though this study was done at a community college level, it is easy to see how the results are transferable to a four-year university.

**Organizational challenges**. There are many challenges an organization can face when utilizing an interim administrator.  Röbken (2007) indicated that continual short-term changes in leadership could have a negative impact on an organization.  Literature has suggested that a lack

of permanent leadership increases uncertainty about the current state of the leadership, the future

of the leadership, and the direction of the organization (Mooney et al., 2013). For example,

strategic planning, long-term goals, and missions of the organization can be put on hold. These

long-term initiatives are vital to an organization's focus and productivity.

Literature has also implied that due to the short-term nature of interim leadership, long-

term strategic planning can be hindered (Rud, 2004) and daunting (Browning & Boys, 2015).

Since interim leaders may be reluctant to initiate deep changes that will provide long-term effects

after their temporary appointment is over, interim leaders will often focus their efforts toward

problems affecting current performance (Röbken, 2007). Ballinger and Marcel (2010) have also

concluded that firm performance decreases and long-term risk of failure increases when an

interim CEO is utilized, except when a chairman is appointed. Medeiros (2010) stated that staff

morale may deteriorate if the interim does not have the preparation, authority, or desire to be

effective. Short-term leadership that focuses on quick results and short-term expectations may

undermine the organization due to a lack of focus on the organization's long-term future

(Farquhar, 1995).

**Organizational beliefs.** During a leadership transition after a crisis, interim leadership

provides a period of downtime for an organization to repair and rebuild (Farquhar, 1995). This

reflection time can have significant benefits. Since interim leadership provides a fresh start to

the leadership, the success of an interim leader has critical implications for the organization

(Browning & Boys, 2015). Therefore, interim leadership allows an organization to depart from

its past in order to focus and move forward (Browning & Boys, 2015). The literature has

suggested that interim leadership can help organizations with smoother leadership transitions

when key members exit (Duncan, 2006). Interim leadership gives organizations the ability to temporarily replace their leadership in a matter of days, versus the weeks or months it may take to conduct a search for the right successor (Duncan, 2006; Topper, 2009).

Interim leadership allows institutions the time to rebuild their organizational structures (Duncan, 2006), reframe their identity for their stakeholders (Browning & Boys, 2015), and reevaluate their financial management (Duncan, 2006). Although interim leadership is temporary in nature, it provides an organization with a segue into new permanent leadership (Browning & Boys, 2015). An organization could also benefit from specific skill sets that were lacking in the previous leadership or at best prepare its employees for change without a long-term employment commitment (Donaldson, 1999; Farquhar, 1995; Inkson et al., 2001).

## Summary

This literature review examined the current research regarding interim administration in higher education. The chapter looked at higher education leadership and its complexities, the lack of research on interim administration, and the tremendous need for interims in higher education. The planned and unplanned turnover of administrators warrants the need for a smooth transition between the gaps left from the departure of the dean to the interim phase to finally finding a permanent leader. This research illustrates that interims can have a significant on this transitional phase and whether they will then be considered for the permanent vacancy. This chapter also examined the parallel between the business sector and higher education. The business sector has long utilized interims in leadership roles, and previous research supports the idea that higher education may learn from their experiences.

**Chapter III: Methodology**

Research has indicated that leadership turnover is high in higher education (Betts et al., 2009; Everley, 1994; Monks, 2012; Nehls, 2012; Song & Hartley, 2012). Thus, searches for a permanent administrator can take a lot of time to fill—from 6 to 12 months, and sometimes even longer. This slow rate of hiring causes institutions to create interim positions to fill the vacant position during the time of the search. Extensive research has been conducted on leadership in higher education, but very little attention has been paid to interim leadership (Ondercin, 2009). For this research, nine current or former interim deans from four-year universities were interviewed. The interviews focused on three main questions:

1. Why do faculty members choose to become interim deans?

2. What professional and personal challenges were experienced as the interim transitioned through the interim appointment?

3. What institutional support strategies should be considered for interim deans as they transition through the interim appointment?

**Research Design**

This research on interim deans in higher education focused on the human experiences of current or former interim deans within the Minnesota State system who had filled the role of an interim dean within the last five years. The study utilized a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is used when "there is a lack of theory or an existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 17). Qualitative research attempts to make sense of, interpret, or understand meaning by gathering data and building knowledge and concepts rather than "testing" them (Merriam, 2009). This focus on

interpretation, construction, and meaning of experience informs the development of the research questions, sample, data collection and analysis, and findings (Merriam, 2009). Utilizing a qualitative research method supports this statement due to the limited research on interim administration in higher education. This research interviewed participants, interpreted their answers, and provided an analysis of the interviews. These characteristics made qualitative research the most viable choice.

The research design for this study was a narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is one of the oldest forms of sense-making and consists of stories or narratives (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002). In this design, the text of a story forms a data set that can then be analyzed. This philosophy of research is often described as hermeneutics: the study of written text. Hermeneutic philosophy focuses on interpretation (Patton, 2015). Because there needs to be a "story told" of how the interim was put into their position, a timeline of events leading up to their time in the position, and other aspects that need to be captured, this research method was the best fit. The questions provided a framework for the participants to discuss their stories and offer a timeline of events during their journey into interim deanship. Since research findings are derived from recurring regularities in the participants' responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), common themes could be created to address the phenomenon being explored and thus add to the limited research about interim leadership and how prepared the participants were within higher education (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2015). The narrative inquiry makes use of various methodological approaches to analyze the interviews. The psychological approach concentrates on the personal thoughts, human intentions, and motivations of the participants. It also considers the biological and environmental influences of the participants. The questions derived in this

study allowed the participants to discuss their own motivations and intentions and to give a background for the situations that were taking place both before and during their interim positions.

The theoretical framework for this study incorporated CLT. The framework of CLT focuses on enabling leaders to control structures that are appropriate for coordinating formal organizations and producing outcomes that are appropriate to the vision and mission of the organization, even with all the moving parts and the complexity of higher education. The narrative inquiry design allowed the participants to discuss their situations as they related to the mission and vision of the institution and how the complexity of the organization played a role in their leadership as interim deans. The questions developed for the participants enabled the researcher to incorporate the CLT framework by enabling the participants to discuss the complex issues that occurred during their time as interim deans. Their stories created an avenue for the research to analyze how this complexity was a part of each participant's journey.

The research questions for this study required the use of a qualitative interview design. There is a continuum model for interviews that a researcher can utilize. This spectrum ranges from structured interviews to semi-structured interviews to un-structured interviews. This research used a semi-structured interview process. For this study, semi-structured interviews were used because the questions gave the participants flexibility to expand their answers and provide more in-depth responses. The interviews also allowed the participants to wander off the questions and not go in any particular order, thus creating a natural flow to the interviews. This flow provided me with the opportunity to explore and add more questions for the participants during the interviews.

# Participants

The participants of the research were from the following five of the Minnesota State system's seven four-year universities: Bemidji State University, Metropolitan State University, Minnesota State University, Mankato, St. Cloud State University, and Winona State University. These universities were chosen because of their influx of interims, their comparable sizes, and their organizational structures. All participants had prior experience in an administrative role as a department chair or director of a program prior to working in the interim dean role. One participant was still in the interim role, one had recently retired, and the others had obtained the position of dean following their interim role. All participants had been interim deans within the last five years. Four women and five men were interviewed. All but one of the participants were internal hires into the interim dean role, and all were asked to apply for the dean position upon completion of their interim assignment. Table 1 has a breakdown of the participants.

Table 1

*Participants*

| Pseudonym | College | Internal/External | Currently Interim Dean |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mark | A | Internal | No |
| Richard | A | Internal | No |
| Melissa | A | Internal | No |
| Susan | C | Internal | No |
| Robert | C | Internal | Yes |
| Ana | D | Internal | No |
| Claire | D | Internal | No |
| Henry | B | External | No |
| Pete | D | Internal | D |

This research focused on interim deans. Deans play a major role in Minnesota State universities. They are responsible for personnel reviews of their subordinates, seeing the "big picture," being involved with strategic planning, and ensuring that the initiatives for their department or college are moving along efficiently. The large spectrum of responsibilities helped determine the leadership roles, characteristics, and strengths that are beneficial for an interim leader. The research questions were used as a guide for the interview questions. The 12 questions asked to the participants were analyzed to create themes that would provide answers to the research questions. The interview questions were not directly tied to an individual research question; rather, a theme was discovered from more than one research question.

Working with the Minnesota State system's office, a list of 31 possible candidates was generated for the interviews. This list contained current or former interim deans who had served in an interim capacity within the last five years at one of the four-year universities in the Minnesota State system. Upon receipt of the list, an email was generated in which I requested participation in the research. Those who responded were contacted and introduced to the project, the researcher information, and the purpose of the study. This included details regarding the methodology to ensure confidentiality. Of the 31 candidates, nine agreed to be part of the research. Of them, two were currently interim deans, and the other seven were former interim deans.

**Data Collection**

The data collection method used for this research was semi-structured interviews conducted with the current and former interim deans. Semi-structured interviews are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored. Neither the exact wording nor the order of the

questions is determined ahead of time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This type of interview allowed me to respond to specific situations, develop a broad understanding of the participants' experiences, and come up with new ideas on the topic. For the purpose of this study, a conversation with the participants presented the opportunity to gather accurate information that conveyed their experiences of working as interim deans.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I informed the participants of the purpose of the interviews and supplied them with my interview questions. I informed each participant of my dissertation topic and how the interview would be used to analyze each experience. Additionally, I communicated to the participants that the interview would remain confidential and their true identities would never be disclosed. The participants were also informed that the institution at which they served as an interim would not be named. At all times during the interview phase, I ensured that ethical behavior, confidentiality, and professionalism were maintained.

The interviews were executed using two methods. Participants were interviewed over the phone and in face-to-face interviews. All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and approximately one hour in length. For both methods, I introduced myself, explained the research topic, and shared my three research questions. Before each interview began, I clarified that I would like the participant to expand on any topic or area to provide me with a full understanding of their experience, and we would not need to follow the order of the questions. Most of the interviews were free-flowing, and the questions were not answered in any specific order. The interview questions focused on around my three research questions. The first questions were asked to get a background and circumstance of the events happening during their transition into

the interim dean position.  The following questions were created to understand what some of the

biggest challenges were for them as interim deans.  The last questions help me understand what

some institutional strategies and support that the interims thought would have benefitted them as

their time of interim dean.  The twelve questions that guided me are listed in appendix C.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis involved consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what the participants

said in the interviews.  The narrative inquiry design of this research helped me to analyze the

participants' responses, as it allowed me to interpret meanings and make sense of the interviews.

The text of the interviews (transcriptions) provided data sets that were analyzed.  The questions

were developed as a guide when analyzing the results from the interviews.  This supported the

narrative inquiry design to make sense of and interpret a text; it is important to know what the

author wanted to communicate and to understand intended meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Utilizing the CLT framework was imperative when the data was analyzed.  The CLT

framework was interwoven in many of the interview questions and was a building block for the

three research questions.  The framework identified the themes or categories created from the

interviews.  Complexity, understanding the mission and vision of the institution, and having the

ability to adapt in the complex organization were all results of the findings.

The data analysis was carried out using a step-by-step process.  The first step was to read

through the transcripts.  During this time, I placed notes and comments in the margins on

participant responses that had jumped out as interesting or were relevant to the study.  I then

went back through the transcribed notes and grouped words and phrases that represented a

common theme in the study.  No words or phrases were discarded, as the information contained

value further in my research. I continually went back to my three research questions, and this helped guide me to the development of the common themes that would address the purpose of my study. I combined words and phrases on a spreadsheet, and this created themes that aligned with my study. I developed sub-themes under the man themes, which analyzed my data in greater detail. The sub-themes supported the main themes and cut across the entire study. Finally, I named the themes as they related specifically to this study. These names were created from at least three sources: from me, as the researcher, from the participants' exact words, and from sources outside of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Threads of the conceptual framework were used as I created and named the themes.

### Positionality

My interest in the topic of interim deans in higher education came about from my knowledge of the high usage of interims in the Minnesota State system. Four of my eight years as a college faculty member have been under an interim dean. It struck me as an unusual way to fill a vacancy until a permanent successor is found. During this time, I was also taking courses in the Higher Education Administration program. Frequently, we discussed topics of leadership and processes within four-year universities, and my interest in exploring the topic of interim deans was piqued as a result. The lack of current research was one of the main reasons why I felt that this topic needed more research.

In my past eight years as a faculty member, I have had the opportunity to work on several projects and initiatives with the interim deans of my college. These projects varied from department curriculum changes to the development of outreach programs to strategic planning for the college. These interactions provided insights into interim deans' roles, day-to-day

activities, and overall responsibilities. Through these interactions, I developed an understanding of the importance of this position within the college. Many times, interims were characterized by others as "placeholders"; however, this was not my perception.

## Data and Study Quality

The quality of the study was based on the accuracy of the results. Trustworthiness in the study was accomplished in several ways. First, the research used member checking with the participants. Member checking occurs when the researcher asks participants to check the accuracy of the findings (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2015). All participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts to ensure accuracy. Second, I conducted an audit of the interviews. Auditing consists of the researcher asking a person who is not a participant of the study to conduct and provide input on the procedures of the study (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2015). Two colleagues reviewed my process and protocols to make sure they were appropriate. For this study, I compared the participants' transcripts. This ensured I developed the findings based on all the participants and reduced the likelihood that I would impose my own experiences on the data.

## Human Subject Approval: Institutional Review Board (IRB)

One risk concerning the interviews was that the participants would experience some level of frustration when recalling events, difficult challenges, and obstacles in their interim role. A second risk was that sensitive comments could be linked to the participant and possibly lead to embarrassment or strained personal and/or professional relationships. The last potential risk could be the participants' fear of losing their anonymity. To address these risks, I took several steps. First, I built rapport with the participants so that they were comfortable giving me honest

and open responses.  Additionally, I was the only one who had access to the consent forms, raw

data, and any related material attached to this research, and electronic documentation was

password-protected on my computer.  All participants had the opportunity to review the

information for accuracy and identify items that they felt would put them at risk or that made

them uncomfortable.  The participants were encouraged to communicate with me if they needed

clarification on the interview process and data collection.  Open and honest communication was

critical to the success of the interviews.  Finally, I communicated to them that if, at any time,

they wanted to drop out of the study, all material regarding their interview would be destroyed,

and no further communication would be done with them regarding the study.  The Institutional

Review Board (IRB) was approved through St. Cloud State University before I proceeded with

the interviews.

## Procedures and Timeline

The timeline for this study was as follows: The proposal to the committee members took

place in May of 2019.  Simultaneously, I worked on obtaining IRB training and application.

Once my committee approved the proposal, I conducted the interviews in July.  I contacted the

participants through email, described who I was, and the purpose of my communication.  I

stressed that the interviews would remain confidential and that names and places would not be

divulged.  When the participants agreed to the interviews, I traveled to their locations or

scheduled a conference call to conduct the interviews.  Upon completion of the interviews, I

analyzed the data and developed the final two chapters of my dissertation.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I provided the methodology of this study. This included the research design, participants, bias, data collection, data analysis, data study and quality, procedures, and timeline. I interviewed current or former deans at five of Minnesota State's seven four-year universities. The interviews revolved around three research questions:

1. Why do faculty members choose to become interim deans?

2. What professional and personal challenges were experienced as the interim transitioned through the interim appointment?

3. What institutional support strategies should be considered for interim deans as they transition through the interim appointment?

**Chapter IV: Results**

This study attempts to answer three research questions related to interim deans in four-year universities in the Minnesota State system. This study will add to the limited research and knowledge regarding the need for interim preparedness, the support that interims need as they serve as leaders in higher education, and the opportunity to assist individuals who are transitioning into an interim leadership role. This research looks into how prepared interims are when moving into an administrative role and what skills they feel are needed to make the transition successful. The research questions listed below were used as a guide for the interviews with the participants:

1. Why do faculty members choose to become interim deans?

2. What professional and personal challenges do interim deans experience as they transition through the interim appointment?

3. What institutional strategies should be considered to support interim deans as they transition through the interim appointment?

This chapter frames the study results for each research question. It includes interpretations, direct responses from the participants, comparisons to data from the literature review, and a summary analysis. The research results will align the interview questions and responses to each research question to present the influential factors and value of each participant's experiences. In order to protect the identity of the participants in this study and the institutions in which they work or previously worked, the eight participants are referred to by pseudonyms. As noted in Chapter III, each participant's response represents their experiences

related to their role as an interim dean at a four-year university within the Minnesota State system.

## Overview of Findings

The participants who were internal candidates had a strong sense of obligation to take the interim dean position. This sense of obligation came from a variety of reasons. Some were in the midst of developing a program within their college, while others felt that they were the only one who could do the job because of their experience and knowledge of the college. None of the participants were looking to take a deanship position.

All participants stated that having informal mentorship during their time as interim dean was extremely valuable. These mentorships came from a variety of different people. Existing deans, faculty, and human resources staff were on the list of people that the participants relied on for support. However, all participants agreed that a more formal mentorship program would have been even more helpful.

The participants believed that institutions need to develop their own candidates for interim dean positions. The importance of identifying candidates and creating avenues, training, and opportunities for possible interims was stated by all participants. Additionally, all participants had been department chairs at some point during their tenure, but this was the only type of training that they had been given. Minnesota State department chair duties are much different than the duties of an interim dean; thus, the preparedness of the interims for the interim position was limited.

Communication—specifically, listening—was a common theme among the participants. Understanding a situation by listening to the parties involved was a challenge that they needed to

overcome.  If a situation occurred, taking the time to analyze the situation from what they had heard and making a decision, not hastily but over a period of time, was a very important part of what they learned in their time as an interim.

<div align="center">**Reasons to Become an Interim Dean**</div>

Understanding each participant's career path toward the interim dean position was important to the study. This background knowledge was valuable for establishing the circumstances or experiences that created the opportunity for the participants to explore their ability to fulfill the role of an interim dean.  This question was also developed to allow the participants to tell their stories gradually in order for them to feel comfortable with me, the interviewer.  Being given background information provided me with some guidance as to what questions to ask next in each interview.  Due to the complexity of higher education and the variety of different circumstances that create the need for an interim dean, in this study, it was necessary to establish what generated the need and vacancy for an interim dean.

**Circumstances**

Research supports that it is important to understand the circumstances for the utilization of an interim.  Establishing this background helped me to analyze certain themes that appeared in accordance with certain circumstances.  Interims entering into a position often encounter different obstacles with different circumstances.  In this study I created a backdrop to the participants' stories so that I could better understand each person's situation and some of the outcomes of their time as interim.

**Previous roles**.  Providing information about their previous roles helped me understand their experiences before they began the interim position.  It gave me insights into their

background/experiences as leaders/faculty members and their role at the institution or other institutions before they became an interim.

Most of the participants had previously been faculty members at either the institution at which they were an interim or another institution. Richard was the only external candidate who came in and accepted an interim position. Most participants cited that understanding the culture and knowledge of other faculty members and other leaders within the university made for a better transition into their new role, along with knowing the circumstances that had led to the vacancy. Also, as faculty members, knowledge of enrollment factors, budget constraints, and strategic initiatives provided the participants with a level of comfort before entering into the role. Susan stated:

> I slipped in seamlessly. All of the roles I would have as deans were provided to me along with a transitional document. I was aware of some of the financial difficulties that the college had and knew that I would need to make some unpopular decisions as an interim dean.

> Pete stated:

> Going into the interim role he knew that he would be dealing with a financial up-hill battle. Having this knowledge beforehand helped him to have a mind-set of how he was going to proceed into the interim dean position.

Furthermore, understanding the union's role and strength within the university aided in the participants' decision-making regarding faculty issues. Melissa stated that have been in the faculty union helped her to work with faculty within her college that she was supervising. She understood the rights of the faculty and was able to relate to them.

Seven of the nine participants were department chairs before becoming interim deans. Robert remarked, "Without the department chair experience, I could not have accepted the position of interim dean. It did not fully prepare me, but it was very useful." Melissa concurred. "Being a department chair, I learned about most of the processes and procedures of our department, and I also had a network of people." Mark and Susan were not department chairs but had held directorships before serving as interims. All the participants except Melissa had had leadership roles serving as directors/project coordinators before becoming interim deans. Susan, Robert, and Claire had had previous leadership roles outside of higher education. These roles were in private sector management. Robert stated, "Even more than the department chair, my experience as a manager supervising people in industry prepared me for this role."

Having had a higher education leadership role and experience provided the participants with some knowledge of what a leadership role entails. Being in a department chair role before taking the interim dean position was considered extremely important in preparing for the interim role. Seven of the nine participants had been department chairs, and they all stated that this role had been a great segue into the new position. Richard stated,

> Being a chair was very useful; you get into scheduling, personnel management, human relations, and further develop your own interpersonal communication skills. You could not go from faculty right into deanship. That's too abrupt. You have to understand processes and procedures of your department, which are also governed by the university or state system.

Some of the participants called it a "test run" in terms of seeing if they would want to pursue an administrative role on a permanent basis. Five of the nine participants had previous

roles as directors of programs, heads of committees, or project coordinators, and they felt this was a valuable tool in gaining experience and thus accepting the role of an interim dean. This experience furthered their knowledge and gave them a "big picture view" of their respective universities. Mark stated:

Talk to your peers, chair, dean, other faculty members, or your president about serving on committees. There are a lot of committees within all universities; while serving on committees, you continue to gain knowledge about the university, you can gain further insight on where you can develop your own talents and acquire new knowledge, skills, and abilities that will contribute to the betterment of the university. This is leadership.

Henry stated that it is important to be engaged not only in your own university but also at the systems level:

Get engaged at the institutional level but be broad and attentive to what is going on at the systems level. When I watch others or when I transition into a new role, I think about a systems-level experience that can help you get a better understanding. One plus of being an interim is that you get in and you learn about the system. For someone who wants to be in a leadership role or administrative role, get engaged to learn and know your university and then the system. Volunteer for different committees.

Many of the participants had had some external leadership roles that went beyond the department chair experience in higher education. Five of the nine had had some experience working in leadership roles outside of higher education. They all indicated that this experience was helpful for their management of people. This management experience gave them a broader perspective instead of a narrow view of higher education. These experiences ranged from

managers in industry to legislative roles.  Robert stated, "I was a manager of quality assurance and product development, so I managed budgets and people."

Very few participants had taken advantage of any leadership training, professional development, or courses prior to entering the interim dean position.  Helen attended the Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Institute and stated that it was very helpful.  The HERS Institute, as defined by their website, is a transformational, leadership development program for women in higher education, founded to fill leadership pipelines across the United States with dynamic women, each capable of ushering their respective institutions into a more inclusive and equitable future (HERS Network, 2019).  Helen stated, "I thought I would never understand higher education.  The president offered me the opportunity to attend the HERS Institute.  I went to HERS, and it really opened my eyes."

None of the other participants had attended any professional development to their recollection; instead, they focused only on leadership.  Ana stated, "One session was on contract, supervision, steps in the disciplinarian process; nuts and bolts stuff.  The legal and technical aspects of the positions, but none of the soft skills that are needed for leadership."

The circumstances surrounding the participants' entrance into the interim dean positions were very similar.  Most had been part of the university or college before being asked to apply for the interim position.  All had been a department chair at some point during their career and had stated that this was very useful in their new role as interim.  Most participants had also had some experience outside of higher education in a leadership role, which also prepared them for the role.  Lastly, most of the interim dean vacancies came about because of a late hire situation in which the institution did not have the time to hire a full-time dean.

**Late hire**. The situation of a late hire was prevalent in most responses. Seven of the nine participants were part of a circumstance where there was an urgent need for a dean. In Henry's case, there was a late resignation of the current dean, and Henry was asked to fill in until they could get someone hired. Claire experienced a similar situation where her predecessor had accepted another position and would be leaving in eight weeks. "This was not one of those situations where you have the time to do a national search. I asked myself, if it's not me, then who would it be?" Claire had the most tenure within her department. She put her sabbatical on hold and accepted the role of interim dean.

In Pete's case, there was a termination. He was asked to accept the role of interim dean and actually did so in a span of three weeks. All the participants were encouraged to apply for the interim position by either the provost or the president of the university. Ana was the only participant who was reluctant to take the position. She felt there was too much distrust between herself and the department. However, she knew that the distrust would allow her to address the issues head-on. Melissa and Susan were asked not to replace an existing dean but to start new colleges within their universities.

The participants' journeys into interim deanship came with a sense of obligation on their part. Seven of the nine stated some type of obligation to either the university or the college. Mark stated:

> When the provost came to our department meeting and said they were looking for an interim dean, I looked around the room and thought, *There is no one here who could do the job*. I felt that my experience warranted the need to apply.

Ana reiterated the same feeling of obligation:

There wasn't anyone else in the college that could have done it at the time. There was

one other person that may have been good, but it wasn't the right time for him. I don't

know if they were comfortable with someone else…they were looking elsewhere, and

then I felt a little pressure to apply for that reason.

Susan and Melissa each felt obligated to start new colleges and thought they could

contribute and a lasting impact on the success of those new colleges.

Susan and Melissa each cared about the success of their respective institutions, as they

took the role of interim. Each felt that they had skills that would help the university be

successful, whether through the development of a new college or a program within the college or

the continuation of current college programs. In the case of Susan, she was asked to start a new

college:

The university had to raise its public profile, creating a college with a mission, which I

believed would put the university in a much better light. I felt it was a contribution that I

could make for the university. It was a good fit. We have tremendous faculty and staff

here.

Melissa felt there was no other options for the college:

There wasn't anyone else tin the school of education that could have taken over as the

interim dean at that time. I don't know if the college was comfortable with anyone else

so they asked me.

Some of the participants came to consider interim deanship because they were looking

for a career change. It was a challenge that they wanted to pursue. They wanted to go from a

department chair role to a dean's role and becoming an interim was the pathway to that career.

Robert and Ana both stated that they were looking for something different.  They both had faculty and department chair roles for many years, and they needed a new challenge.  Robert stated:

I had been in the interim role in 1994 and had vowed never to do it again.  But I was at a point in my career where I liked teaching, but I was teaching the same thing over and over.  I loved teaching the students, but I was looking for something different.  Even though I had vowed not to go back into the role of interim, I needed the change.

### Professional and Personal Challenges

This question was related to the preparedness of each participant.  Some of the challenges that the interims faced stemmed from not being prepared for the role of interim dean.  Being prepared for an interim position affects the success of a leader.  What prepared them and how well they were prepared established an important part of understanding some key areas that needed to be researched to prepare the interim deans.  This question also helped to understand obstacles the interims had encountered during their transition.  The complexity of an institution created challenges that affect leadership ability.

To understand some of the challenges, I needed to get an idea of some of the interim deans' responsibilities.  Depending on the position, an interim dean can have many different roles and responsibilities.  Each participant was instrumental in learning or getting to know the specific expectations of his or her direct supervisor, which was the Provost or President.  All the participants expressed that they wished to take the 'interim' off the title. The roles and responsibilities were that of a dean.  Priorities were established based on the individual circumstances that had created the interim vacancy.  Having open communication with the

president and provost was important.  All nine participants stated that before they took the role of

interim dean, the president or provost spoke to them about the role.  All stated that they were told

that they had the same roles and responsibilities as a permanent dean.  Helen stated:

> You get the same roles and responsibilities.  The only difference is that "interim" is in
>
> your title.  That is how I approached it.  I didn't get caught up in the fact that this was an
>
> interim position.  If you are going to step into a leadership role, you have to step in and
>
> fill those roles and responsibilities as best you can.  Whether interim or permanent, I
>
> looked at this role as if they were the same.

All participants stated that budgeting was one of their responsibilities in their role as

interim dean.  Eight of the nine also stated that this was one of the biggest challenges.  Ana

stated, "We looked at every place we could get money; it drove everything that went on for those

two years.  The budget was a huge piece."  This was very similar to the circumstance that Pete

explained:

> The budget was the backbone of many of the decisions made.  There is only so much
>
> funding and you had to work within these parameters.

In Claire's situation the previous dean had been awarded a large grant.  She had to budget

the grant and the steps of implementing it.  This was a very time-consuming part of her

responsibilities as the interim dean.

In many of the participant's situations, declining enrollment and a lack of state funding

drove these circumstances.  Claire stated, "I had seen some enrollment concerns but thought we

were in reasonable financial health; only three weeks after taking the role did I get my first

indication of where we were financially."

Faculty supervision was part of all of the participant's duties except Robert. All the participants indicated that this was much different from what they did in their role as department chair. Department chairs have no supervisory authority within the Minnesota State system. Melissa stated:

I was responsible for probation and tenure process. I was interviewing and hiring faculty. interview, hire faculty, and someone is in charge with discipline that is necessary high level of ethics and integrity so that they are not sharing information that shouldn't be shared, high level of respect for all people be the model for what they look at the university as an inclusive organization and environment promote fairly and be transparent.

Five of the nine stated that they were part of the faculty already, and they perceived this as a benefit to entering the position. Robert stated:

He had the benefit of knowing how some of the faculty felt about certain initiatives and strategic plans that the college was pursuing. This prior knowledge helped him with how he approached specific faculty on these issues.

Listening was a major skill that the participants highlighted in the interviews as a challenge. Anyone who is in a leadership role needs to be able to communicate well to provide accurate information to the people they are leading. Part of communication is the ability to listen. Five of the nine participants noted that listening and understanding a situation made their role much easier. Mark stated:

Ability to listen, because you need to take the information from the administration, faculty, and students, and you are the go-between. You have to listen if there are issues,

evaluate the information you hear, and look at implications or consequences to how you respond to or resolve a certain matter.

Participants needed to use their listening skills for all aspects of the job. Working with the community at large, students, faculty, and administration were all noted as being important. This skill transfers into what the participants stated as not reacting immediately and trying to understand the situation. Ana responded, "Listen, take it under advisement. Well, over 70% of the time, it resolves itself. A lot of listening, talking, and not rushing in. The last thing you would want to do is solve it for them. They can solve it themselves in most instances."

Along with listening skills, being able to evaluate and interpret a situation was evident as an important leadership skill that challenged the participants. Many participants cited that they did not need to respond immediately. Taking time in certain situations allowed for the whole story to reveal itself and gave the participants time to think, research, and formulate a response rather than provide a knee-jerk reaction. Ana commented:

> You will have three piles. Pile one: Those issues you need to deal with immediately.
> Pile two: These are the matters you need to take care of soon. Pile three: Will take care
> of itself. The wisdom is to know where to put what and learn that a lot of it could be left
> in pile three. Listen. Then take it under advisement.

It was very clear that listening, fully understanding the situation, and taking the time to respond were challenges for all the participants as they served in their interim roles. Mark stated: "you must look at the entire picture and think strategically on how you will follow up. Don't think you need to know everything right away. Ask questions and listen well."

One way to help prepare for the interim deanship was getting involved with campus functions. Six of the participants saw great value in future interims being exposed to committees, leadership roles, and coordinating roles across the campus. Getting out of the department silo and meeting others campus-wide is critical to establishing a network and thus being successful in the role. Not only does the person learn about other aspects of the university but they also get their name out there as a leader. Mark responded, "Be visible; be on committees. Being active and knowing other people in other departments, not just your own, are some of the best ways to understand and learn about the student and faculty experience." Four of the participants discussed the importance of being

involved with work at the national level. This work was often within participants' disciplines or for causes about which they were passionate. Pete discussed that being involved with accreditation at the department, college, or university level is important. Richard stated:

> Extend beyond the campus community. I had positions on national and international
> boards. I think I dismissed that somewhat, but this was instrumental in helping me
> acquire skills that I was able to use elsewhere. Leadership at a national or international
> level, for me meant helping set up conferences, reviewing articles, what gets accepted for
> proposals or grants—these are judgement calls; any experience where judgement is
> required is extremely useful.

### Institutional Strategies to Support Interim Deans

This question helped me determine what support systems are in place to help support interim deans' transition into the position. The question also opened up conversations about

what types of support the system can offer and how the interims can better prepare themselves for this complex system.

Creating avenues for future leaders to gain experience in leadership was important to the participants. As Robert stated, "growing your own" is important in the transition from a permanent dean leaving to an interim entering. Understanding the processes, budgeting, supervisory roles, and other duties of a dean is crucial for a smooth transition. This avenue is created from several areas. For instance, provosts and presidents consider prior leadership duties as a way of grooming the future candidate. Pete stated:

> I was an interim dean several years before his stint as current interim dean. My previous role helped him to transition into his current role. Having future candidates attend leadership retreats with current administrators was also suggested. This exposure could help the future interims to understand the roles and responsibilities of a dean.

Henry stated:

> Creating professional development opportunities that can teach administrative knowledge would have been helpful. Understanding the Minnesota State system and how it works from financial management, academic planning and leadership are all important.

Having the support of others within the university was important to all the participants. The participants believed that it would have been extremely beneficial for them had mentorship programs been developed for them while they were in the role of interim dean. Some worked with other deans in mentoring relationships across the university, but this was a very informal process. Seven of the nine participants stated that having formal or informal meetings and phone calls with other interim or permanent deans was useful. Melissa recalled, "I went and talked

with other deans; three had started about the same time as me.  We developed a network of support in our roles."

Four of the participants worked on a regular basis with upper administration on questions and concerns.  Susan stated that she had a scheduled meeting with other permanent deans from different colleges every two weeks to go over her questions.  Some of the other participants did not have scheduled meetings but could schedule times to meet when needed.  Mark stated: "Anytime he had a question he could reach out to his provost for answers and that he had been given great support from executive leadership as he transitioned through the interim deanship." Robert suggested that there be a prescribed program to have permanent deans work with interims almost like a mentorship.  Most of the informal mentorships were with current deans within the university, permanent deans from other universities, provosts, presidents, and others in leadership roles at their respective universities.  Notably, mentoring can go beyond fellow deans. Ana stated:

> Some of the informal conversations she had had with human resources staff guided her
> through hiring and disciplinary issues. Anybody going into an interim position should try
> to have a good relationship with their human resources department and other supporting
> areas in higher education.

All the participants had the opportunity to attend professional development sessions through the systems office after they were in the role of interim dean.  However, many inconsistencies existed in the participants' experience of the professional development that was offered to them.  Each interim dean's training varied, depending on which university or department they served. Ana described her professional development:

It happened twice a year and it was on general administration and not specifically on

dean leadership but as a general administration in higher education. The trainings also

were not just for the four-year universities but also for the two-year community and

technical schools.

This was much different from the experience that Henry had, in which his professional

development was on leadership very specific to deans but had no administrative type of training.

Additionally, the training that one interim dean received did not exist during another interim's

term. None of the participants were given any opportunities for professional development in

leadership on their own outside the systems training. Only two of the participants found that the

systems training was beneficial. Eight of the participants attended some professional

development sessions available through the systems office. The three training programs were the

Science of Leadership, the Art of Leadership, and the Minnesota Executive Leadership program.

These professional development opportunities were not required by the systems office, but in

two of the participants' cases, the university required them to attend. Robert was the only

participant who thought the training was beneficial. The others described it as not really useful.

The participants gave mixed answers as to what they thought was missing from their professional

development. Claire shared that she did not find the professional development incredibly useful.

She goes on to say that she needed more qualitative training on what does it mean to be an

interim dean. Four of the participants thought they needed a better understanding of the

processes and procedures of the university and systems office. The other participants wanted

more information on what is involved in the role of a dean (e.g., leadership skills that a dean

should have). Claire stated:

The Minnesota State system programs you learned about your leadership style, decision

maker, supervisor programs. Most of these programs that were offered did not address

processes and procedures and budgeting.

All the participants except Richard had previously worked at the university at which they

were an interim. Six of the participants said that grooming future leaders before they begin in

their interim position is important. Developing leadership skills and educating future leaders on

university processes and procedures would also be beneficial. Helen commented:

I would encourage institutions to constantly think about ways of investing in potential

future leaders. They should not be viewed as a placeholder but in a position of leadership

and empowered to make important decisions. I would challenge higher education

institutions to set the expectations of an interim dean as no different than those of a

permanent dean.

Developing a diverse candidate pool and equipping them with the skills for success needs to

begin with onboarding at the university. Richard stated, "Grooming our diverse faculty members

so we have a "deep bench" to choose from when it comes time to fill the interim dean position is

essential to the success of the university."

Having clear expectations from the provost or president before entering into the interim

position was voiced by two participants. Different circumstances create different expectations.

The development of a new program within a college has a different set of expectations than

getting into an interim position where there are enrollment issues that need to be addressed.

Communicating clear expectations demonstrates the university's personal investment in the

interim dean. This action eliminates levels of hierarchy and shows the faculty that the interim

has the same expectations as a permanent dean. Melissa stated, "The definition of what an interim dean is should be clear: It is a dean."

Three of the participants stated that understanding the expectations of the interim dean position was the best advice. As stated earlier, these expectations can vary depending on the circumstances of the interim who is taking the position. Along with clear expectations and responsibilities, two of the participants stated that a person who comes into an interim role should not consider him or herself an interim. Melissa stated, "You are the dean; the interim is a label that administrators like to use. There was nothing different from interim to permanent about what I did." It is important to understand that a role as an interim dean is the same as that of a permanent dean.

The participants were very clear that a formal mentoring process would have been beneficial to them as they transitioned into the interim dean position. Although most were given some type of support from other deans or upper administration, more formalized mentoring would have been more beneficial. Clear expectations of the interim role were pointed out as important during this time. If this had been stated early in the process, it would have helped. Proper professional development was not provided to most participants; the participants stated that this would have been useful, as it would have allowed them to understand the day-to-day processes and procedures involved in the role.

## Summary

My interviews with nine current or former interim deans yielded several important themes. These themes start with participants really having a sense of obligation to take the interim dean position and were not looking to become a dean. Secondly the participants believed

that a formal mentorship program would have helped as they transitioned to the interim dean position. The possibility for universities to "grow their own" was evident in the interviews. Participants believed that developing leadership skills before entering the interim position would have been helpful. Lastly developing good communication skills, specifically listening skills, was important in their role as an interim dean. This research will help to support future research on this topic. In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings, the limitations of this study, implications of practice, implications of theory, and implications of research and the need for further research.

**Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions**

This study was conducted due to the frequent use of interim deans at four-year universities within the Minnesota State system.  This time of transition is often critical.  The interim dean role can be likened to a "linchpin" that fastens the different parts of the institution together so that the various operational units do not "slide off" of the set mission and core values (Ankrah, 2007).  Add in the complexity of higher education, and you have a very important role as an interim.  As the turnover rate for leadership positions increases, concern over how to find and replace these individuals with qualified potential candidates escalates (Ebbers, Conover & Samuels,2010; Luna, 2012; Neefe, 2009, Rothwell, 2010).  Preparing future leaders to fill the role of an interim dean is crucial in times of high turnover.

**Reasons to Become an Interim Dean**

Research Question 1 was designed for the researcher to gain an understanding of how the participants evolved in their interim positions.  This background knowledge was valuable in establishing the circumstances in which the interim vacancy arose.  Current research shows that due to the complexity of higher education and the variety of different situations that can arise, it is important to understand the circumstances that create the interim vacancy.

I concluded that any leadership experience before entering an interim dean role is beneficial for a candidate, especially in the complexity of higher education.  Experience in other leadership roles is also helpful for them to develop the skills that are needed to be an effective interim dean.  The role of department chair was a crucial part of the participants' journey before becoming an interim dean.  This role helped with their gaining of knowledge about budgets,

system processes and procedures, and other university leadership commitments. While a previous department chair role was vital, other leadership roles were also valuable.

Involvement in university committees and coordinating activities on campus was important. These activities took the individuals out of their departments and allowed them to collaborate with others across campus, further developing their leadership skills. These individuals showed commitment to the university by serving on professional organizations at a national and/or international level. Working at this level gave the participants the ability to work with others across the nation and took them out of their comfort zones. This was important because, as an interim dean, many of the participants needed to deal with issues or circumstances in which they had little knowledge or experience. This helped the participants to listen well, to gather all the facts, and to not make decisions too quickly. The participants who had had previous leadership roles in business and industry, not just experience in higher education, shared that this experience provided them with a broader perspective of people, process, and budget management, as well as aided their supervisory responsibilities.

**Professional and Personal Challenges of Interim Deans**

This question was related to the preparedness of each participant and helped the researcher to understand the obstacles they encountered during the transition. The complexity of an institution can also create or contribute to challenges that affect a leader's ability to be effective in the role.

Anyone who is in a leadership role needs to be able to communicate well to provide accurate information to the individuals they lead. A critical part of communication noted in this research that the participants thought was a challenge was their ability to listen. Not only did

they need to listen to hear and understand, but they also needed to listen so that they could respond appropriately. The participants also shared that when working with faculty, students, or other administrators, taking the needed time to calmly respond to matters was critical. Having a knee-jerk reaction was not the best way to respond. Some situations needed time to play out, time to be solved by those involved, or time for the participant to gather facts to make the best informed decision or response. This was a challenge that the participants needed to overcome, and they realized this as they transitioned into their role. It was very clear that listening, having a good understanding of the situations they faced, and taking the time to respond made the participants better leaders.

**Institutional Strategies for Interim Deans**

This question helped to determine the support systems that are in place to help support interim deans' transition into the position. The question also opened up conversation about the types of support the system can offer and how interims can better prepare themselves in this complex system.

Creating avenues for future leaders to gain experience in leadership was important to the participants. As Robert stated, "growing your own" is important in the transition from a permanent dean leaving to an interim entering. Understanding the processes, budgeting, supervisory roles, and other duties of a dean is crucial for a smooth transition. How this avenue is created can come from several different sources. Prior leadership responsibilities within or outside of the organization provide the basics. Provosts and presidents identify this as a means of grooming the future candidate. It was also suggested by the participants that future candidates should be invited to attend leadership retreats with current administrators. Any exposure to a

dean's roles was said to be very important to a successful transition into an interim deanship. Creating ways for our minority professionals to develop leadership skills and opportunities is another area that was important to the participants. They felt that having more diverse leaders would benefit the institutions.

Another area that the participants believed is critical is the development of a mentorship program for the interims while in the interim dean role. A prescribed program in which permanent deans can work with interims would have been helpful. Many of the participants were given informal mentoring while in the interim position, but none were part of a specific program while serving as an interim dean. Most of these informal mentorships were with current deans within the university; however, some were with permanent deans from other universities, provosts, presidents, and others who were in other leadership roles. The participants believed mentorship was critical in navigating through the interim term.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to answer three research questions related to interim deans at four-year universities in the Minnesota State system. This study attempted to add to the limited research and knowledge regarding the need for interim preparedness, the support that interims need as they serve as leaders in higher education, and the opportunity to assist individuals who are transitioning into an interim leadership role. This research looked into how well-prepared interims are when moving into an administrative role and what skills they feel are needed to make the transition successful. I used CLT, complex leadership theory, as the conceptual framework for this study (Uhl-Bien et al. 2007). CLT theorists have conceptualized

leadership into three categories: administrative, adaptive, and enabling (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009; Marion, 2013).

While examining the administrative category, this study utilized Uhl-Bien et al. (2007), who defined administrative leadership as the "actions of individuals in formal managerial roles who plan and coordinate organizational activities (e.g., the bureaucratic function)... Administrative Leadership is a top-down function based on authority and position, thus it possesses the power to make decisions for the organization" (p. 306). The participants in this study entered the role of interim dean with the directive from either the president or provost that they had full dean authority. The notion that the title of interim was somewhat different than a permanent dean was put to rest. The interims had the power to make decisions and were not simply placeholders. This study supports this theory.

According to the adaptive category in CLT, adaptive leadership seeks to produce a rich flow of information that enhances dynamic complexity processes; adaptive leadership does not seek the directing or motivating of subordinates (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). This study does not completely support this portion of CLT. The circumstances in which the interim deans entered the position affected how they approached the people who were working for them. In some of the cases in which a new or recently new program was developed, the interim needed support from the faculty. In those circumstances, the interim needed to motivate the faculty and gain support. On the other hand, some participants did not need to motivate the faculty. This does not suggest that no motivating was done by the interim dean; rather, the interim dean was tasked more with providing information and communicating with the faculty. This research

stated that listening was a major skill set that is needed in the leadership role. This supports the adaptive leadership category of CLT.

The last category of CLT is enabling leadership. Enabling leadership produces internal methods for processing environmental demands and either enhances or suppresses the dynamic processes, depending on the environmental stimulus (Marion, 2013). This theory supports the current study. In some of the circumstances they faced, the participants were tasked with new initiatives. As interim dean, they needed to develop methods to move the initiatives forward and communicate with the faculty. In some cases, the internal processes had already been created by the former dean, while in other cases, the interim dean needed to create their own processes.

**Prior Experience in an Interim Deanship**

Previous life experiences and ongoing learning shape us all. I asked this question to understand the knowledge and skills each participant possessed prior to entering their role as interim dean. In doing so, it sought to determine whether any themes within the participants' prior experiences as leaders existed. Due to the complexity of higher education, possessing experience, leadership skills, and knowledge can make for an easier and successful transition from an interim to a permanent dean. CLT leaders are multilevel in that anyone can engage in many of the leadership functions (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2009). Schneider and Somers (2006) stated that in CAS, complex adaptive systems, leaders "lead without authority and often do in a temporary capacity" (p. 356). Developing the skills needed to be an interim dean come from the knowledge gained from being a department chair and sets the stage for the hierarchy in higher education. Some responsibilities of a department chair are similar to those of an interim dean; however, one major difference at all universities within the Minnesota State system is that a

department chair does not have any supervisory authority.  Understanding the university and

systems processes and procedures, as well as working with the faculty and students, are just a

few tasks that are shared by department chairs and interim deans.

Along with the experience of being a department chair, the participants spoke about other

leadership opportunities they had had that had been equally important before entering into the

interim dean position. Such opportunities included leadership opportunities across the campus,

working with committee chairs at the university level, and working with other colleges on

strategic institutional initiatives.  Much of the research supports this theory.  Madsen (2010)

stated that higher education is constantly seeking prepared, qualified, competent, effective, and

ethical leaders to navigate schools into the future.  Other areas of experience that were noted

were having leadership positions at the systems level.  This helped the participants understand

the entire system, not just the inner workings of their own department or university.

Another area of experience that the participants thought was beneficial was the

opportunity for leadership development at the national level or outside of the higher education

field.  Working with others on a national conference or being on a national board.  At this level

of leadership, the opportunity for the participants to get out of their comfort zone presented itself.

Lack of familiarity with processes and procedures and how decisions are formed provides a

learning opportunity and a sensible approach to problem-solving.   Succession planning is great

for organizations, the planning needs to be more in-depth than simply identifying those

individuals who will be next in line for a position (Day, 2011).  The participants found

themselves in similar situations due to the lack of formal training before entering into their

interim positions.  Working in the private sector helped with some of the leadership skills needed

as an interim. Davis (2008) supported this theory and suggested that higher education could "borrow" strategies from the corporate world for developing leaders to truly benefit colleges and universities. All participants felt they were not fully prepared for the interim position, but these leadership opportunities helped with the transition.

There is a lack of published research on leadership competencies and development for those in higher- and executive-level positions in higher education, rather mid-level managers such as deans and chairs or faculty status (Filan & Seagren, 2003; Thrash, 2009). Thus, understanding the prior experiences of interims would help to develop formal training that would aid them in their transition into the deanship.

**Challenges Faced by an Interim Dean**

The complexity of the dean's role is supported by the literature. An executive summary in a Minnesota State survey illustrated the following competencies a dean must have: (a) to mediate and collaborate effectively, (b) to exhibit entrepreneurial and innovative thinking, and (c) to successfully manage budget and fiscal issues (Minnesota State Colleges, 2010). This complexity leads to several challenges for interim deans.

Having a good understanding of their role as interim deans was challenging to the participants. What were the expectations as an interim versus a permanent dean in addition to the day-to-day tasks of a dean? One of the most significant challenges stated by the participants was that they were in a supervisory role over faculty. As a department chair, they had no supervising authority. This challenge became even more complicated when the interims became the supervisors of their fellow department faculties. Wolverton and Gmelch (2002) agreed with these results and stated that deans:

Serve two masters. On one hand, deans are expected to carry out the plans and decisions approved by the university's chief executive. On the other, deans are expected to work in tandem with faculty whose loyalty may, at certain times, be to their professional interests rather than to the institution they serve. (pp. 1-22).

Working with the faculty the participants felt this separation between the faculty and the institution.

One recurring theme was that the participants needed to know how to listen. Students, faculty, and higher administration were all given as groups that they needed to listen to and understand. Coupled with good listening skills, the participants stated that not making "knee-jerk decisions" was very important. Taking time after they listened and not making quick decisions were processes that most of the participants believed were important. This strategy helped with the challenges of working with faculty and their direct reports.

There are many different circumstances in which an institution will utilize an interim dean versus hiring a permanent dean. Such circumstances found in this research included a short hiring time frame for the deanship, unexpected resignations, and terminations as reasons for the creation of the interim dean vacancies. The dean's role is critical at many levels of a university, and it is important to take the time to hire the right person as the permanent dean. Davis (2008) stated that first, they encourage individuals to accept the role of department chair, then dean, then provost or vice president of academic affairs, then president. This unplanned path that leaders follow is the result of high turnover in administrative positions in higher education. This is supported by the research that has indicated that senior leadership turnover is frequent in higher education institutions (Betts et al., 2009; Everley, 1994; Monks, 2012; Nehls, 2012; Song &

Hartley, 2012).  The short time frame was a challenge to the participants, as they were very quickly put into a position with which they were not familiar and did not have an understanding of their role.  The interims were utilized to allow a proper national search to find someone that would fit the needs of the college or university; however, clear expectations of the interims were not provided, created unknowns for them.

## Institutional Strategies

Support for interim deans at the university and institutional levels is very important.  The complexity of higher education requires an interim to provide as much stability as possible in the transition period.  Since interim leaders can be key players in maintaining stability, facilitating change, and providing a transitional pathway for permanent leadership (Mundt, 2004), it is important for the short-term leader to clearly understand their purpose (Mooney et al., 2013).

As stated earlier, many of the participants in this study were in some type of leadership role before taking the interim dean position.  Their previous experiences thus helped them as they transitioned into the interim position.  In most instances, the participants were looking for leadership opportunities and looking to expand their knowledge and skills as leaders.  The participants reported that there was no formal program to enhance their leadership skills.  They agreed that having a formal "growing our own" process is extremely important.  Previous research supports the idea that most interim positions are filled by internal candidates.  Internal interim leaders are typically appointed from internal employees who are already serving as a fixture in an authoritative group within an area that experienced leadership turnover (Browning & McNamee, 2012) because it is typically less disruptive to do so for an organization (Ferrin & Plank, 2002).  The high turnover rate in higher education has created the ongoing need for

interims.  Research has indicated that senior leadership turnover is frequent in higher education (Betts et al., 2009; Everley, 1994; Monks, 2012; Nehls, 2012; Song & Hartley, 2012).  Along with frequent turnover, the employment of postsecondary education administrators is projected to grow by 10% from 2016 to 2026, faster than the average of all occupations.  Developing some type of formal program would better prepare candidates who want to pursue a career in leadership.

Part of this formal program should be the development of mentorship programs for interim deans.  Most of the participants stated that they had found informal mentors among the permanent deans.  They concur that these mentorships were very helpful as they transitioned into the deanship role.  Most participants found mentors through the process of getting to know other deans during regular dean meetings.  It was easier to find a mentor when the participant was an internal candidate.

<center>**Limitations**</center>

Qualitative research is dependent on the participants of the study.  Limitations could have emerged with regard to each participant's unique circumstances in entering the interim deanship, as well as their previous leadership experience.  This study did not focus on only one type of circumstance regarding the departure of the previous dean and the hiring of the interim dean.  For example some of the participants were internal hires while one of the participants was an external candidate.  Some of the participants were appointed into the interim role while others had to through a more lengthy hiring process. Certain circumstances could have warranted different answers from the participants and would be difficult to generalize the findings.

The participants in this study were limited to those within the Minnesota State system. The utilization of interims at this specific institution may vary greatly from other universities. To illustrate this, the Minnesota State system's faculty are all union employees. This union has particular processes and procedures that may differ greatly from non-union institutions and, as a result, may lead to different outcomes. It would be difficult to extrapolate some of the findings to other types of institutions. Additionally, the participants were only those from within four-year universities. A further limitation is that of the nine universities within the system, only five participated.

The quality of any study is based on the accuracy of the research and the trustworthiness of the researcher. Developing accurate transcriptions from the recordings is essential to obtaining accurate statements. The interpretations of the transcripts can be a limitation if the researcher does not have a full understanding of what the participants are trying to say. The semi-structured interviews helped the researcher ask clarifying questions when necessary.

The sample size of the study presents a limitation as to the generalizability of the study. There are currently 31 current or past interim deans from the last five years. This study included nine interviews, which is a small percentage of the whole. Generalizing from a small percentage of participants to such a large pool can have limitations in applying the results to all institutions.

The final limitation is the researcher. Because I collected and interpreted the data, my bias could be considered a limitation. As a researcher, I followed all proper processes and procedures to limit my biases as much as possible. As a faculty member and part of the system that is currently utilizing interim deans, I may have developed biases from my experiences with previous interims.

**Implications for Practice**

Higher education often utilizes interim administration.  It is not uncommon to use an interim in the dean's position before a permanent dean is hired.  This study sought to determine the preparedness of interims who are entering into the position.  Having interims who are well-prepared to take this role can help with a smoother transition and provide a more stable environment for the college and institution.

**Professional Opportunities**

This study provided information on the importance of leadership opportunities for individuals seeking leadership roles.  Presidents and provosts need to identify these individuals and provide these opportunities to expose future leaders to processes and procedures specific to Minnesota State.  The complexity of this large institution makes it difficult for someone who does not understand it to maneuver through it.  Such opportunities would also help to develop in individuals the leadership skills that are needed to be an effective leader.  Providing professional development opportunities along with leadership experiences could provide future interims with some of the tools that they need to be successful, such as good communication and listening skills.

Many Minnesota State interim deans are internal candidates, due to the need to "grow our own." Providing these types of opportunities for these internal faculty to become interim deans is of great benefit to both them and the institution.  It is vital that the systems office work with all of the higher education programs within Minnesota State system institutions.  Working together on items such as curricula and specific student outcomes, Minnesota State processes, having leadership within the university be a large part of the program, and job shadowing for students

are just a few opportunities that could be developed within higher education to help "grow our own."

**Mentorship Programs**

The importance of the development of a formal mentorship for interim deans was evident in this study. Most of the interims had had some type of informal mentorship; however, none of them experienced any type of formal mentorship. This could have provided them with someone who understands the system, can share their own experiences, and can point them in the right direction as to who to turn to for help in certain circumstances. This type of mentorship could be developed at the institutional level or the systems level. In the private sector, many leaders work with leadership coaches. This practice could also be developed in the higher education sector. The participants in this study made it very clear that mentorship, even at an informal level, was a very important part of their interim experience.

**Higher Education Programs**

Currently in the Minnesota State system, there are three doctorial programs that focus on higher education leadership. These programs are meant to develop individuals who are currently in a higher education leadership role or who may be currently pursuing a higher education leadership role. Because these programs are grooming our future leaders, it is extremely important for universities to work with these programs and provide their expertise, knowledge, and guidance to help produce effective leaders. As the participants in this study stated, a better understanding of the processes, procedures, and structures within this complex organization would have been extremely useful. Universities and higher education programs need to develop an advisory type of board and create curriculum and student outcomes that align with the needs

of Minnesota State institutions. This could be a variety of different paths that a potential interim could take. Professional development trainings during workshop days that could specifically address leadership as an interim. Another pathway is for students within the higher education program that are working on getting their doctorate could have courses that are specific to Minnesota State. These courses could range from processes, procedures, and budgeting that are Minnesota State specific.

## Implications for Research

The number of interims in higher education is high; however, research on interims is very limited. More research is needed to provide higher education institutions with the knowledge to help those individuals in these positions. There are three areas of emphasis that further research needs to address.

This study was specific to a very large state system. Further research needs to focus on other types of institutions across the nation. For instance, interim deans at a research or private institution can provide a different perspective on being an interim. Are the numbers of interims at these types of institutions as high as the higher education system, and if not, why? This could help answer the question of why the Minnesota State system has so many interims. Looking at non-union, higher education institutions is also an avenue for further research. Minnesota State has a very influential faculty union and looking at institutions that are not guided by a union could provide other insights into the interim role.

Research is needed in current formal mentorship programs to determine what effect they have on the success of interims, especially in higher education. Such research could also help develop a formal program for the Minnesota State system. Additionally, identifying mentors and

what training or subjects are most important and effective for interim would be beneficial.  Other professional development opportunities are needed to groom interim deans in higher education. Why are other institutions successful in the interim transition, and what can Minnesota learn from them?  Further research could identify the obstacles faced by Minnesota State in providing interims with the proper professional development they need to be successful.

In 2015, Minnesota State's percentage of students of color was 24% (Minnesota State Colleges, 2018).  The representation of leadership within the Minnesota State system does not reflect the large number of minority students in the system.  Developing programs to target minorities to ensure better representation among the state's leaders is needed.  Having leaders who understand diversity on our campuses will enable them to make better decisions that affect the student body.  Once again, if our higher education programs helped to promote minorities within these programs, they could help develop the skills needed to lead.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

This chapter outlined some of the discussions, limitations, and impacts my study has had on research concerning interim deans.  The discussion presented my opinions and interpretations of the data presented.  I broke this discussion into four areas of emphasis: prior experience in interim deanship, experiences gained from a deanship, challenges of an interim dean, and institutional strategies.  The chapter also outlined the limitations of my study.  These limitations include the type of institution, the small number of participants and my personal limitations as the researcher.  The impacts of my study were broken down into implications for theory, implications for practice, and implications for research.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**
**Institutional Review Board Protocol**

**ST. CLOUD STATE**
UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR LIFE.

**Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Charles Hentges

Email: crhentges@stcloudstate.edu

**IRB PROTOCOL**
**DETERMINATION:**
**Expedited Review-1**

**Project Title:** Interim Administration in Higher Education

**Advisor** Rachel Friedensen

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

-Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

**IRB Chair:**

Dr. Benjamin Witts
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
Department of Community Psychology,Counseling, and Family Therapy

**IRB Institutional Official:**

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

**OFFICE USE ONLY**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| SCSU IRB# 1912 - 2458 | Type: Expedited Review-1 | Today's Date: 7/11/2019 |
| 1st Year Approval Date: 7/11/2019 | 2nd Year Approval Date: | 3rd Year Approval Date: |
| 1st Year Expiration Date: 7/10/2020 | 2nd Year Expiration Date: | 3rd Year Expiration Date: |

**ST. CLOUD STATE**
UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR LIFE.

# Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South MC 204K, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

## Continuing Review / Final Report

Principal Investigator:   **Charles Hentges**

Co-Investigator:

Project Title:       **Interim Administration in Higher Education**

If the project has been completed (no longer collecting data on human subjects) please indicate your projects status under Final Report and complete questions 1 through 5.  If you have completed collecting data on human subjects but continue to analyze the data, as long as no new data is being obtained, your project would be considered completed.

If the project has not been completed (you are collecting data on human subjects) please indicate the status of your project under Continuing Review/Project Continuation and answer questions 1 through 5.

**Final Report**

_____ The Project has been completed.
_____ Project has not and will not be conducted. Explain:

**Continuing Review/Project Continuation**

_____ Data collection continues with enrolled participants.
_____ Participant recruitment continues following approved IRB protocol.

Have any changes been made to your research project (changes in subject recruitment, informed consent documents, design, methodology, procedures, etc.) since it was approved by the IRB?
_____ No
_____ Yes, explain:

Final Report and Continuing Review/Project Continuation, please answer the following:

1. How many participants have participated in your study  _____

2. Have any adverse events (complaints, unexpected reactions, discomfort, or problems) occurred during this research project
   _____ No
   _____ Yes, explain:

3. Have any participants withdrawn from the research, either voluntarily or at the researcher's request?
   _____ No
   _____ Yes, explain:

4. Has any new information been identified that may affect the willingness of subjects to participate in this research project?
   _____ No
   _____ Yes, explain:

5. Have any changes been made to your research project (changes in subject recruitment, informed consent documents, design, methodology, and procedures, etc.) since it was approved by the IRB?
   _____ No
   _____ Yes, explain:

_____        _____
Principal Investigator's Signature                                        Date                    SCSU IRB#: 1912 - 2458

**Appendix B**
**Consent Form**

**Interim Administration in Higher Education**
**Consent to Participate**

You are invited to participate in a research study about how prepared you were as an interim dean before and during your time as an interim dean.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to be interviewed for approximately one hour. I would like to audio record our conversation, but if you do not feel comfortable with recording I will take notes during our time together.

Benefits of the research will help higher education institutions better prepare and support their interim leadership.

The main risks include exposure of decisions you have made, decisions of employment of people reporting to you could be exposed, or situations that may have happen during your time as an administrator. As an administrator many confidential decisions are made and there could be a risk of repercussions if your identity were exposed. Lastly, if you are considering advancing your career in administration you could potentially jeopardize this advancement.

Data collected will remain confidential. Responses will be kept strictly confidential and your name will not be disclosed nor will identified direct quotes be used. During the interview you may refuse to answer any questions. After the completion of the interviews, you will receive your transcribed interviews. At this point, if you wish to make expand responses or note omissions to the transcription, you may.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Charles Hentges, crhentges@stcloudstate.edu, Rachel Friedensen, refriedensen@stcloudstate.edu, or Office of Research Programs, St. Cloud State University, ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu. Results of the study can be requested from the researcher or can be reviewed at the St. Cloud State University Repository.

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age, you have read the information provided above, and you have consented to participate.

_____     _____
Signature                                    Date

St. Cloud State University
Institutional Review Board
Approval date: 7-11-2019
Expiration date: 7-10-2020

**Appendix C**
**Interview Guide**

**Interview Guide:**
1. What was your previous role before entering into the interim position?
2. Describe the circumstances of you entering the interim position.
3. Tell me about roles and responsibilities you undertook as an interim.
4. Tell me what inspired you to take the interim role.
5. Prior to entering your interim position, what prepared you for the leadership role?
6. After becoming an interim, tell me the professional development opportunities offered to you to further support your preparation.
7. During your time as an interim administrator, describe the leadership skills stand out as the most important?
8. What steps, if any, can future interim leaders take to prepare themselves for administrative leadership role?
9. Describe the leadership skills that you feel candidates should have prior entering an interim position.
10. Tell me about the professional development opportunities that best prepare you for leadership.
11. What steps, if any, institutions of higher education take to position themselves better when utilizing an interim?
12. What advice would you give to a person coming into or currently in an interim Dean position?