

Cultivating Collective Sensemaking:  
Exploring How Academic Deans Shape Academic Priorities  
During the Annual Budget Review

by

Nathan F. Harris

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(Higher Education)  
in The University of Michigan  
2017

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Michael N. Bastedo, Chair  
Professor Deborah Loewenberg Ball  
Professor Kim Cameron  
Professor Janet H. Lawrence

Nathan F. Harris

[nfharris@umich.edu](mailto:nfharris@umich.edu)

ORCID iD: [0000-0002-0956-5281](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0956-5281)

© Nathan F. Harris 2017

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate my dissertation to Dean Austen, Dean Conrad, Dean Huxley, Dean Joyce, Dean Stowe and Dean Swift. You deserve more credit than you receive and suffer more criticism than you deserve. Without your belief in this research – and your willingness to take a chance on me – I would not have learned as much about the work of academic deans, the craft of qualitative research and the challenges that confront senior administrators at public research universities. I have tried to characterize your efforts as accurately and fairly as possible. The future of public research universities depends on the skill, sensitivity, energy, passion and wisdom of administrators like all of you. In time, I hope this research encourages scholars to investigate the work of academic deans in further detail and inspires faculty to consider journeys into academic administration.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many individuals who have encouraged, advised and inspired me on this journey to completing a doctorate. First, my parents, Fred and Martha Harris, deserve special praise. My parents worked themselves through college; and while they learned important lessons in charting their paths, my parents insisted that my brothers and I enjoy the luxury of a different journey. Their commitment to education, however, extended well beyond opening their wallets. My parents created a home environment that stimulated one's curiosity. My brothers and I were encouraged to ask questions, seek knowledge, marshal evidence and craft arguments; that was our everyday reality at the dinner table. My love of exploring what people think and why they think it can be traced back to posing questions to my parents and corralling answers from them. Jennifer and I strive every day to create a similar environment for Thomas Champe and Elizabeth Ann. Moreover, I appreciated the moral support of my parents while shifting from a career in management consulting to one in academe.

Second, I would like to thank the amazing professors at the University of Michigan. I was lucky to attend a top-notch doctoral program – the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education (CSHPE). CSHPE has a sterling reputation because of its talented faculty. It offered an exciting intellectual setting in which to investigate problems in higher education. I will always appreciate the teaching,

mentorship and good cheer of Dick Alfred, Steve DesJardins and John Burkhardt.

In particular, I thank – or in Michigan’s vernacular, hail – two CSHPE professors – Mike Bastedo and Jan Lawrence. Mike encouraged and stimulated my interest in studying universities as organizations from the moment I visited Ann Arbor as a prospective student. As a student, research assistant and doctoral advisee, Mike pushed me to realize higher standards and believe that I could make a contribution to our field. He encouraged me to take a diverse set of courses in organization theory across the university; through these experiences, I nurtured a deep knowledge of organization theory and pushed my intellectual comfort zone. While designing my dissertation, he provided critical advice that saved me headaches and heartaches. He reassured me that the project was important when recruiting participants proved difficult at first. While reading drafts of my dissertation, he offered feedback that not only improved the document, but also planted seeds for what this research could become in the months and years to come. Mike continues to teach me, making time for me in big and small ways. I am grateful for his mentorship and friendship; I look forward to learning more from him as I forge my own faculty path. Similarly, Jan always made me feel welcome at CSHPE. I would often swing by her office to discuss her work and explore my interests. Jan finds a way to scrutinize and assure at the same time. Jan's footprint can be traced throughout my dissertation, especially with my problem specification and research design. I thank both of them for serving on my dissertation committee and extending their expertise, time and patience, especially Mike for serving as chair.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge three other UM professors – Kim Cameron, Deborah Ball and Karl Weick – who all influenced my dissertation. Kim

served on my dissertation committee from the beginning and agreed to several informational interviews while I was crafting my dissertation proposal. In these discussions, Kim revealed candid reflections from his tenure as a dean, which animated the complexity of the deanship. Despite her busy schedule as dean, Deborah made time to take an interest in my research and explain her approach to deaning – even on a Super Bowl Sunday. Her insights offered realism to my research, helping me to anticipate a range of responses during data collection. As members of my dissertation committee, Kim and Deborah offer feedback that challenge my assumptions. I also appreciate their encouragement of my future efforts. Before retiring, Karl Weick influenced my dissertation, especially my dissertation proposal and plan for data collection, in critical ways. We not only discussed the nature of sensemaking, but also explored how to infiltrate the moments in which managers shape priorities. Moreover, Karl's courses in sensemaking and organizational scholarship stoked my interest in conducting a dissertation grounded in the interpretative paradigm.

Third, I would like to acknowledge numerous teachers throughout my formal schooling. At Bellaire High School, Vicki Ross and Natalie Hebden first stimulated my interest in writing. At James Madison College at Michigan State, Ron Dorr introduced attitudes and tools that improved my writing every time I sat in a chair and began to type. Michael Schechter crafted exciting and rich courses in international relations; I try to emulate his example every time I teach class. Moreover, he encouraged me to embrace research and expand my academic and career horizons. Over time, Mike has also offered nuanced insights about the nature of academic governance. I am grateful to several professors at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE). At HGSE's master's

program in higher education, I began to realize an academic interest in investigating universities as organizations. It was a treat to attend the classes of Judy McLaughlin, Bridget Terry Long and Dick Chait every week. They pushed our cohort to scrutinize the nature of American higher education and the curious organizational realities of colleges and universities. I would not have been prepared to pursue a doctorate in higher education without their encouragement and tutelage.

The University of Michigan provides a rich learning environment beyond its academic programs. As a doctoral student, I learned in many milieus. A core aspect of my apprenticeship was teaching as a Graduate Student Instructor (GSI) in the Organizational Studies (OS) program for eight semesters. In OS, I gained a deeper understanding of organization theory and learned the craft of teaching college students. While writing my dissertation proposal, collecting data and analyzing data, I worked as a GSI for Victoria Johnson, Steve Garcia and Sara Soderstrom. As a professor at the University of Rochester, I apply lessons learned from Victoria, Sara and Steve in the classroom every week. They are all gracious (and fun) mentors.

Fourth, I have enjoyed the camaraderie of numerous colleagues along my academic and career journey. While contemplating a career shift from management consulting to working with universities, colleagues at the Corporate Executive Board offered helpful advice, including Lane Ryan, Liz Lord and Dave Williams. After graduating from Harvard with a master's degree, I enjoyed the mentorship and friendship of Jim Stiles at HGSE. While considering doctoral programs, Jim made time to discuss the intellectual and emotional challenges of academic administration, which deepened my perspective. The faculty sets the tenor at CSHPE, but a continual stream of talented,

ambitious and thoughtful doctoral students enriches and renews the program's culture. I learned from many classmates, including Rosie Perez, Cassie Barnhardt, Ozan Jaquette, Matt Holsapple, Julie Posselt, Kate Thirolf, Molly Ott, Pelema Morrice, Jim Barber and Mary Antonaros. At UM, I also gained a deeper appreciation for the scope of research universities by contributing to numerous projects with the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) and teaching for three semesters in the Summer Bridge program. At CRLT, Connie Cook was always eager to support my endeavors. Connie influenced my dissertation in important ways, including reminding me that some deans might not divulge sensitive budgetary data to anyone, let alone an enthusiastic doctoral student like me. I also thank Chris Bass for her encouragement, curiosity in my research and interest in my family.

Fifth, I would like to acknowledge the support of my current faculty colleagues at the University of Rochester. Among many friendly faces and encouraging voices at the Warner School, I would like to thank my colleagues in Education Leadership, including Brian Brent, Karen DeAngelis, Logan Hazen, Bryan Goupal, Tricia Shalka, Steve Uebbing, Kara Finnegan and Chelsea BaileyShea. You are talented (and fun) professors; it is a treat to be your colleague. I would also like to thank Dean Raffaella Borasi, Jayne Lammers, Jeff Choppin, Doug Guiffrida and Carol St. George for their support. To Warner's doctoral students in higher education, especially Stephon, Michael and Kevin, I will continue to push and encourage you.

Sixth, I would like to thank some longtime friends for their moral support. In particular, the gentlemen of 536 Abbot remain an integral part of my life. I know that Frank Aiello, John Dillenbeck, Zach Gorchow, Mike Grant, John Hughes, Tim Miedona



and Saty Talati will definitely make me laugh, occasionally grit my teeth and even think about important questions. Without question, the daily email thread with John, John, Mike, Saty, Tim and Zach offered a welcome distraction, especially on the frustrating days. I also thank my brothers, Jonathon Harris and Jeremy Harris, for their love, moral support and example. When I think I might be working hard, I realize that the two of you are probably working harder. To Jon and Jeremy, thank you for pushing me to accomplish more; I hope you feel me nipping at your heels, if only a little. Throughout my doctoral experience, I have appreciated the encouragement of other close friends, including Mary Antonaros, Lucie Fry, Amanda Sloat and Jessica Gracon. I am also grateful for the unfaltering support of Bill and Hilary Cary as well as the cheer of all members of their family.

Seventh, while I was born into a fantastic family, I lucked out by marrying into one, too. My in-laws always encourage Jennifer and me, including offering support in big and small ways throughout my doctoral study. My father-in-law and mother-in-law, Doug and Allyne Maltby, have always encouraged my academic and professional ambitions. As a retired principal, Doug also offers invaluable advice about understanding and navigating academic environments. Once Thomas and Elizabeth were born, Doug drove the roundtrip between Kalamazoo and Ann Arbor every Thursday to care for the kids while Jennifer and I were at work. In addition, Jeff and Laurie Maltby offered incredible support throughout my doctoral studies, including housing us in Canton before Jennifer and I bought a home in Ann Arbor. Laurie also cared for Thomas and Elizabeth every Monday until their grandchildren were born, which freed time for

Jennifer and me to work. I also appreciate the moral support of my sisters-in-law, Ann and Kim, as well as Phil and Gualberto.

Finally, Jennifer Maltby, my amazing wife and partner in crime, deserves unique praise. Jennifer has always supported my endeavors, demonstrating an incredible sense of adventure and patience. I appreciate all of Jennifer's sacrifices – big and small, emotional and financial – that made this dissertation and whole doctoral experience happen. I have tried not to miss too many moments while completing this work; and I appreciate Jennifer's understanding when I have been distracted. Without her love, I probably would not have embarked on this experience; and even if I had, I know it would not have been as satisfying or fun without her. While I might not recommend starting a family when designing and completing a dissertation, I am grateful that we did, especially with the love and support of our families. To Thomas and Elizabeth, thank you for demonstrating a zest for life, even at excessive decibels. Every day, embrace and nurture your curiosity. Your questions offer a constant reminder of what it means to be an educator. Life is out there for the taking – go for it. I look forward to charting more adventures with our family in the years to come. Jennifer, thank you – I love you!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
LIST OF APPENDICES	xiv
ABSTRACT	xv
CHAPTER	
<b>I. Introduction</b>	1
<b>II. Literature Review</b>	21
<b>III. Research Methods</b>	57
<b>IV. Institutional Profile – Sprawling University</b>	81
<b>V. Shaping Academic Priorities as Dean: Exploring the Intersection of Identity, Biography &amp; College Context</b>	104
<b>VI. Authoring the Annual Budget Memorandum: Enacting Budgetary Authority During the Annual Budget Review</b>	169
<b>VII. Making Sense of Academic Priorities as a Team: Establishing a Collective Sense of Priorities during the Annual Budget Review</b>	200
<b>VIII: Stimulating Dialogue on Senior Teams: Creating an Environment for Cultivating Collective Sensemaking</b>	246

<b>IX: Making Sense of the Provost's Priorities during the Annual Budget Review: Navigating Interdependence in Decentralized Budget Models</b>	297
<b>X. Discussion</b>	337
APPENDICES	390
BIBLIOGRAPHY	407

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

- |                                                                                               |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. The Relationship Among Enactment, Organizing and Sensemaking                               | 40 |
| 2. Modeling the Sensemaking and Sensegiving of Academic Deans during the Annual Budget Review | 53 |

## **LIST OF TABLES**

1. Biographical Backgrounds of the Profiled Deans	65
2. Summary of Data Collection with Profiled Deans	65

## LIST OF APPENDICES

A. Potential Survey Questions: Oversight of Decentralized Budget Models in Universities	390
B. Potential Survey Questions: Stimulating Dialogue on Senior Administrative Teams	394
C. Potential Survey Questions: Self-Study of Senior Administrative Teams	397
D. Letter Requesting Participation	400
E. Informed Consent Form	402
F. Interview Protocols	404

## **ABSTRACT**

While academic deans have long influenced academic governance, they now serve as chief executives more than middle managers at many universities. This increased stature stems from many universities implementing decentralized, revenue-centered budget models, which situates authority for academic and budgetary affairs with deans more than provosts. Despite their critical work, and increasing significance, scholars have yet to investigate how academic deans enact their authority as the chief academic and budget officers of their colleges.

To close this research gap, this qualitative case study explored how six academic deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review at Sprawling University, a pseudonym for a prominent American public research university. The theoretical framework was anchored in the organizational concepts of sensemaking and sensegiving, while data analysis was disciplined by grounded theory. Data was collected from extensive interviews and observations: 63 semi-structured interviews with the profiled deans, college-level administrators, other deans and senior central administrators; and 21 observations, including meetings with the profiled deans and their senior administrative teams.

The findings advance our understanding of how academic deans shape academic priorities during annual budget reviews in three important ways. First, a rich tapestry of



individual and organizational factors influenced how deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities. While shaping academic priorities, the profiled deans affirmed their faculty identities by espousing collegial norms such as collaborating with faculty and administrators, enacting skills that validate their disciplinary orientations and privileging perspectives that reflect their faculty experiences.

Second, most profiled deans framed the annual budget review as an opportunity to craft a collective sense of academic priorities with their senior administrative teams. The most significant milestone of the budget review was authoring an annual budget memorandum for the provost. Most deans co-constructed this memorandum with their senior teams, initiating a collective form sensemaking to generate ideas for priorities and deepen commitments to priorities. To cultivate collective sensemaking, these deans enacted discursive behaviors that stimulated open dialogue during team meetings such as waiting to reveal their own ideas, specifying problems rather than imposing solutions and empowering disagreement. In contrast, deans who excluded their senior teams from authoring the budget memorandum alienated associate deans and administrative directors, which created confusion over priorities.

Third, deans aligned the priorities of their colleges with the provost's priorities for the university. Despite retaining authority over academic and fiscal priorities in their colleges, deans embraced the provost's priorities as well as the provost's preference for articulating priorities in quantitative terms while authoring the annual budget memorandum. This alignment revealed the sensitivity of academic deans to resource dependence; deans wanted to demonstrate a commitment to the provost's priorities and

preferences in hopes of securing scarce discretionary resources from the provost's office, regardless of whether their college reported a surplus or deficit.

In addition to specifying how deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review, significant contributions of this study include illustrating how deans depend on their senior administrative teams and illuminating the interdependent relationship between deans and provosts in decentralized budget models. Moreover, the findings indicate a dynamic, reciprocal interplay between managerial sensemaking and sensegiving, which advances theorization of sensemaking in organizations. The study reveals numerous opportunities for future research on deans, including probing accountability in decentralized budget models, and recommendations for practice, including orienting deans to decentralized budget models.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Research Problem**

##### *Public Research Universities Under Threat*

Academic deans are creatures of research universities. An investigation of their work, therefore, should begin by exploring this organizational context. Unfortunately, American research universities, particularly public universities, are under threat on numerous fronts. Most notably, state support for public universities has declined in recent decades. State appropriations accounted for 38 percent of the total operating revenues for 101 major public research universities in 1992, but appropriations only constituted 23 percent of the total operating revenues for these institutions in 2010 (National Science Board [NSB], 2012). The fiscal pressures of the global recession on state treasuries only exacerbated this trend. In 2007, the average state appropriation per FTE (in 2010 dollars) for very high research public universities was 82 percent of what it was in 1990; in 2010, just three years later, the average state appropriation per FTE for very high research public universities was only 86 percent of what it was in 2007 and 71 percent of what it was in 1990 (NSB, 2014). These trends prompted the National Research Council (NRC, 2012) to warn, “states have concluded that they can no longer justify giving high priority

to sustaining their public research universities at world-class levels” (p. 85).

Moreover, federal funding for university research has become less predictable. Total federal funding for university research decreased from \$40.2 billion in FY2012 to \$39.5 billion in FY2013, continuing a decline in the proportion of university research funded by the federal government that began in the mid-2000s (National Science Foundation [NSF], 2015). In FY2004, 63 percent of research expenditures in higher education came from the federal government, but this figure had dropped to 59 percent by FY2013 (NSF, 2015). After adjusting for inflation, federal funding for university research declined by almost 13 percent between FY2011 and FY2015 (NSF, 2016). The federal government’s total investment in research reveals a similar trend. With Congress cutting spending as part of sequestration, federal support for all research activities decreased between FY2011 and FY2013 over a three-year period for the first time since the late-1950s (American Academy of Arts and Sciences [AAAS], 2015).

The future portends a more constricted economic and political context for public research universities in their states. In recent years, some governors have proposed significant cuts in funding for state flagship universities that range from \$80 to \$300 million (Kelderman, 2015, 2016). Governors and state legislators are also expressing renewed interest in developing funding frameworks that bound state expenditures to accountability measures such as graduation rates and workforce needs (Kelderman, 2015; National Governors Association, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). In some states, including California and Texas, governors and legislators have negotiated modest increases in appropriations in exchange for capping tuition rates, even though these new revenues pale in comparison to pre-recession appropriations (Gardner, 2014; Kelderman, 2014).

These escalating pressures, along with other challenges such as changing student demographics, transforming technologies and burgeoning global competition, concern education leaders as well as some political officials and corporate executives because the diminished vitality of public research universities compromises the nation's economic competitiveness and social welfare. At the invitation of Congress in 2005, the National Academies formed the Committee on Prospering in the Global Economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to explore policy reforms that the federal government could adopt to stimulate science and technology. The committee's report, *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*, charted recommendations for skilling the nation's workforce and stimulating economic growth. The committee acknowledged "the critical role" of public universities in supporting the nation's "system of education, research, and innovation," arguing that their role was "more important than ever" as the "training grounds for the people and ideas that drive innovation and improve our lives" (National Academies, 2007, p. 357). The committee, however, warned that universities confronted "intense" fiscal pressures that threatened their sustainability (National Academies, 2007, p. 357).

In response to this report, Congress commissioned a follow-up study that specifically explored the relationship between national competitiveness and research universities. In this report, *Research Universities and the Future of America*, the National Research Council (2012) underscored the contribution of public research universities to national competitiveness, arguing, "Any loss of world-class quality for America's public research institutions seriously damages national prosperity, security, and quality of life" (p. 85). The National Research Council recommended that the federal government, state governments, business and industry and universities all take specific actions to bolster

public research universities. Public research universities, for example, should improve the “efficiency” and “productivity” of academic programs and business operations. To this end, universities were advised to conduct ongoing strategic planning and external assessments of academic programs. “All U.S. research universities should implement ... measures to ensure leaner and more productive academic and administrative operations in the long term” (NRC, 2012, p. 105).

Through its Lincoln Project, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences advanced similar suggestions by exploring the relationship between public research universities and state governments. In its final report, *Public Research Universities: Recommitting to Lincoln’s Vision – An Educational Compact for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the Lincoln Project committee (AAA&S, 2016a) recommended that universities continue to cut costs and pursue new revenue streams. While acknowledging that institutions have realized “substantial cost savings” over recent years – administrators have demonstrated “inventiveness and urgency” (AAA&S, 2016b, p. 18) – the committee asserted that institutions need to sustain these efforts, “if public research universities hope to attract new funding and develop new academic research programs” (AAA&S, 2016a, p. 11).

Furthermore, the investment community has echoed these recommendations for public universities. Moody’s (2015a) argued that universities could further trim expenditures and reinvest savings into academic programs. “Universities will continue to explore expense containment and efficiencies, making it ever more difficult for universities to choose where to invest in order to remain competitive” (Moody’s, 2015a, p. 1). Moody’s (2015a) contended that meeting this imperative will prove “contentious” for universities (p. 3). “Most universities have already tackled the low hanging fruit of

expense reductions and will be more fundamentally examining their programs and organizational structures,” according to a vice president at Moody’s Investor Services (Moody’s, 2015b). Standard & Poor’s (2016) offers a more optimistic outlook for public research universities, but warns that even prominent institutions might have difficulty funding “critical academic initiatives” due to anticipated increases in expenditures and decreases in appropriations (pp. 16-17).

### *Academic Deans – Agents of Action in Universities*

These calls for public universities to create leaner and more productive operations beg an important yet unexplored question – who exactly should lead these organizational changes? Despite an occasional reference to “institutional leadership” (NRC, 2012, p. 158) or “university administrations” (AAA&S, 2016b), policy and investment briefs do not identify who should be designing, implementing and managing the prescribed reforms that might improve the efficiency and productivity of universities. Senior central administrators such as presidents are bound to shape these efforts. Not surprisingly, the blue-ribbon committees of the National Academies and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences included many current or former chancellors and presidents of prominent public (and private) research universities, including the University of California – Berkeley, the University of Texas and the University of Virginia. Moreover, research in higher education has long demonstrated the important role that presidents assume in articulating academic and financial priorities for their universities (Cohen & March, 1974/1986; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al, 1994; Kezar & Eckel, 2002).

Despite the inevitable influence of presidents, the extent to which public research universities adapt might depend on academic deans more than presidents or provosts. In research universities, deans occupy an elusive nexus that bridges the strategic initiatives of presidents and provosts, the research and teaching of faculty and the intellectual and social development of students. The outside world, and even boards of trustees, might look to presidents and even provosts to reform universities, but it is deans who presidents and provosts tap to translate overarching institutional directives into tangible blueprints for action. Wolverton, Wolverton and Gmelch (1999), for example, argued, “In the academic anatomy of institutions of higher education, deans provide the delicate but crucial backbone of university decision making” (p. 80). Similarly, Gary Krahenbuhl, a former dean at Arizona State University, explained, "Everybody's perspective collides in the dean's office. The dean is trying to manage the expectations of all the different people and move the college forward as best as he or she can" (June, 2014, para 24). In the words of one provost, “Deans are the natural bottleneck, looking for solutions in an isolated world” (Kramer & English, 2017, para 8).

In fall 2014, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* explored the increasing importance of academic deans in its feature article “To Change a Campus, Talk to the Dean.” The article asserted that deans are determining the fate of public research universities more than ever as institutions continue adapting to sustained periods of economic and political uncertainty. “Academic deans are the ones top administrators rely on to push schools and colleges to evolve ... deans have their hands on more levers than almost anyone else on campus. Whether campuses can transform themselves, working within tight fiscal constraints, often comes down to their deans (June, 2014, para 5).



Moreover, the article described how the deanship has become more complex at many universities. Deans “must think big and be the public face” of their colleges, tend to the needs of faculty and students, convince faculty and staff to “embrace” the university’s strategy – all while proving themselves to be “shrewd money managers” (June, 2014, para 7). With the breadth and complexity of their portfolio, academic deans have come to resemble chief executives more than middle managers. "Deans today are almost like mini-presidents ... You're in the line of fire as a dean," according to a prominent academic search consultant (June, 2014, para 8). Similarly, a provost writing in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* recently argued that, “in the current Rubik’s Cube that is the contemporary university, the people we see as the crucial linchpins for transformation are the deans” (English & Kramer, 2017, para 3).

In part, the increased prominence of academic deans stems from more universities implementing decentralized budget models over the past two decades. With these models, authority for academic and budgetary affairs increasingly rests in the dean’s office of each college rather than the president’s office or provost’s office (AAA&S, 2016b; Carlson, 2015; Curry, Laws & Strauss, 2013; Hearn et al, 2006). Decentralized, revenue-centered budget models, which are often characterized under the banner of Responsibility Center Management (RCM), are designed to “unleash the deans” by providing incentives for deans to become more entrepreneurial in developing new academic programs (and generating accompanying revenues), containing costs and charting the future vision of their colleges (Carlson, 2015). These budget models promise flexibility and rewards, but decentralized models also present risks to deans. “Sink or swim,” a dean working within this budget framework owns “the destiny” of their college (Carlson, 2015, para 4). As

universities adapt to new fiscal and political realities, deans are charting the future of their institutions more than ever before.

Despite their vital role in universities, and their increasing significance, a surprisingly modest literature explores the work of academic deans. Over the past fifty years, scholars in higher education have published a scant and fragmented literature on deans. In the mid-1950s, David Riesman (1956) recommended focusing more scholarly attention on the “anonymous” role of deans to better understand organizational change in universities (pp. 21-22). In his investigation of the deanship, Dill (1980) avowed, “It appears that educational researchers ... essentially have been disinterested in examining a role that, in their own profession, is rumored to be consequential but is charged frequently to be ineffective” (p. 125). In his research on public research universities, Rhoades (2000) called for scholars to look beyond presidents and provosts to deans who “profoundly shape universities’ ability to shift and pursue strategic priorities” and “to concentrate as much on the actual behaviors and connections among administrators as on the formal delineation of their roles as individuals” (p. 62). These episodic calls have gone mostly unanswered for decades, even amidst an emerging consensus that deans are more important than ever.

More specifically, the literature on academic deans features several notable gaps. First, few empirical studies actually examine the work of deans. After accounting for advice from former deans, the literature features some quantitative studies that explore the background characteristics of deans (Gould, 1964; Del Favero, 2005, 2006a, 2006b), the responsibilities of deans (Montez, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 2002; Rosser, Johnsrud & Heck, 2003; Wolverton, Gmelch, Montez & Nies, 2001) and the faculty expectations of

deans (Bray, 2008, 2010). Other studies (Gates, 1997; Hardy, 1990; Marcus, 1997; Morphey, 2000; Porter, Zemsky & Oedel, 1979; Rhoades, 2000; Slaughter, 1993) mention the role of deans within the broader context of organizational change and program retrenchment. These studies examine aspects of what academic deans do, but rarely offer insights about how deans approach and conduct their work.

Second, scholars tend to overlook the most important of responsibilities of deans. Most notably, outside of several studies exploring retrenchment, research in higher education does not examine how deans establish and articulate priorities while balancing budgets or engaging the budgeting and planning processes of their universities, despite former deans and scholars consistently emphasizing the importance of this work. Montez, Wolverton and Gmelch (2002), for example, found that fiscal management was emerging as the biggest challenge confronting deans in the future, including making allocation decisions and evaluating financial planning (p. 257). “Deans can delegate many of these consequential fiscal tasks to business managers but must be cognizant of the underlying concepts that drive financial decisions. Deans are ultimately responsible for their colleges’ well-being” (Montez, Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002, p. 257).

Moreover, scholars have yet to explore another central if elusive responsibility of academic deans – shaping the future of their colleges. Yarger (1998) reminds us that deans are usually hired to lead their colleges “to bigger and better things” (p. 141). Krahenbuhl (2004), a former dean at Arizona State, explains, “A college will be dynamic if, in part, the dean creates an environment where the people who make up the college – its faculty, students, staff, alumni, and friends – are empowered to imagine the possibilities” (p. 4). He advises deans to establish an environment that stimulates a

“proactive organization” in which individuals “dream” to “aggressively” invent the college’s future (Krahenbuhl, 2004, p. 4). This charge to deans reflects the observations of education scholars (Tierney, 1989) and other former deans (Morris, 1981) that deans interpret and translate the priorities of their colleges. Despite scholars and former deans stressing the interpretive work of deans, particularly in shaping the priorities of their colleges, research has yet to explore the ways in which deans approach this work.

Third, the literature on academic deans misses opportunities to understand the relationships between academic deans and other key university stakeholders such as provosts, associate deans, department chairs and senior faculty. “Deans are brokers of relationships because they help set a tone and facilitate various forms of interaction that occur in colleges” (Krahenbuhl, 2004, p. 4). Accounts of other former deans emphasize the relationships both between deans and provosts with respect to balancing budgets and improving academic programs and between deans and college-level administrators such as associate deans and department chairs in developing academic programs (Bright & Richards, 2001; Morris, 1981; Sloat, 2014). In reflecting on his experience as a dean, Krahenbuhl (2004) stressed the importance of engaging associate and assistant deans, administrative directors and department chairs. Research in higher education, however, has yet to explore how deans collaborate and consult with these colleagues. Worse yet, some research (Morphew, 2000; Slaughter, 1993) fails to differentiate perspectives among university administrators, missing opportunities to explore the distinct perspectives among different leaders such as the president, the provost, other central administrators, deans and associate deans.

For scholars, this incomplete body of research limits our understanding of how academic deans at research universities navigate an uncertain political, economic and social context. This missed opportunity disconnects research in higher education from the realities of how deans, even in an era tightening budgets, are working to promote research and scholarship, enhance academic quality, refine curricula for a global and knowledge-based society and economy, implement new learning technologies and advance commitments to social justice. Despite the prevalent shift to decentralized budget models at many universities, scholars have yet to investigate how deans enact their authority as the chief academic officer and chief budget officer of their colleges. As education scholars, we would be wise to focus our analytical attention on investigating the behavior of deans, or as Rhoades (2000) argues, “directing attention to management, not just to individual managers, to the administration of academic colleges” (p. 61).

The dearth of research on academic deans also hinders practitioners. Research in higher education offers deans little advice from which to improve their own leadership practice. In particular, the absence of research misses an opportunity to inform the practice of new deans because they typically assume their roles with little, if any, formal leadership and management training (Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). “Time spent as a faculty member is invaluable in attending to the academic aspects of a deanship,” but a dean’s work requires a “quite different” portfolio of skills – “new perspectives” and “the need for new knowledge and understanding” (Krahenbuhl, 2004, p. 199). With this lack of formal preparation, deans often “learn the ropes in isolation” (Roper & Deal, 2010, p. 27) and initially feel overwhelmed (Fagin, 1997; Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). An incoming dean, for example, can quickly surmise that balancing budgets and

collaborating with the provost and associate deans is prudent, but the literature offers few insights about how to approach these activities.

The higher education literature also offers limited insights for seasoned deans. The literature, for example, presents little advice to experienced deans who are adjusting to new challenges such as working with provosts and colleagues within their college to develop new (or cut existing) academic programs or navigate new resource constraints. Moreover, this lack of research offers few insights for curious and reflective practitioners who work closely with academic deans such as provosts and associate deans to reference in hopes of strengthening their relationships with deans. Our field's uneven interest in exploring the work of academic deans undermines the relevance of higher education scholarship for academic leaders.

### **Rationale for Research Design**

My dissertation aims to begin bridging some of these gaps in the literature on academic deans. With my dissertation, I wanted to explore one of the most essential responsibilities of academic deans – shaping academic priorities within the fiscal realities of their colleges. While scoping my dissertation proposal, I reasoned that shaping academic priorities was probably becoming more challenging for deans at public research universities; deans are assuming more responsibility over academic and fiscal levers at these institutions while confronting increasingly uncertain economic and political environments. This hunch was substantiated by the aforementioned reports from the National Academies and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and commentary in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

With this focus, I deduced that a fruitful context for bounding my investigation would be examining how academic deans shape academic priorities during a university's annual budget review. A university's budget review features organizational milestones that couple the academic and fiscal responsibilities of deans. In decentralized budget models, for example, deans are typically required to articulate the academic and fiscal priorities of their colleges in a document called a budget "call letter" and discuss these priorities with senior central administrators such as the provost in a meeting called the budget hearing (Curry, Laws & Strauss, 2013).

My investigation does not explicitly examine budget models, but it explores how academic deans shape academic priorities within the context of a specific budget framework. I thought that studying how deans shape academic priorities while navigating the milestones of annual budget review would not only bound my investigation in a practical sense, but also contribute to the literature on academic deans because an increasing number of deans at universities across the country are navigating these decentralized budget contexts. By situating my investigation in a university's annual budget review, I also aimed to explore the extent to which deans shape academic priorities by engaging central administrators such as the provost and administrators in their colleges such as finance directors and associate deans.

With this research focus, I surmised that an insightful theoretical framework for examining how deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review would be the organizational concept of sensemaking. A number of quotations from previous deans, including those featured earlier in this chapter, embody the propositions of sensemaking. Morris (1981), for example, called deans "institutional interpreters" (p. 48)

and “information movers” (p. 153) who not only share “facts and data,” but also “viewpoints, opinions, hunches, forecasts, predictions” (p. 153). Moreover, Krahenbuhl (2004) advised deans to empower individuals across their colleges to “imagine the possibilities,” which “means looking ahead ... expecting that the future will be better because of the ideas that emerge to be pursued” (p. 4). He recommended that deans engage their senior administrative teams to generate “richer perspectives on important questions and issues” and harness “the collective intelligence of the group” to construct “a better-informed sense of what might be possible” (Krahenbuhl, 2004, p. 46).

These depictions of a dean’s work epitomize the character of sensemaking in organizations. The concept of sensemaking explores how individuals navigate uncertainty and ambiguity by creating plausible images of reality to guide and rationalize their action. Weick (2001) explained, “Sensemaking is about contextual rationality. It is built out of vague questions, muddy answers, and negotiated agreements that attempt to reduce confusion” (p. 108). Among “a million things that go on” and the “clusters of things that go wrong,” what does the situation mean and what should I do? (Weick et al, 2005, p. 411). Similarly, Taylor and Van Every (2000) describe sensemaking as “turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard for action” (p. 40).

The concept of sensemaking shifts our focus from discrete and static notions of making decisions to more dynamic and fluid notions of making sense of environments. As individuals strive to understand situations, they engage a dynamic interplay of sensemaking “resources” – social context, identity, retrospect, salient cues, plausibility, ongoing projects and enactment (Weick, 1995). Individuals, for example, extract cues



from their social context, striving to construct a plausible definition of a situation; in doing so, individuals reflexively privilege interpretations that affirm their identities and corroborate their past experiences; individuals then enact behaviors after generating sufficient understanding of the situation; from these actions, which test the plausibility of their understanding, individuals confront reactions that either validate their interpretations, thus crystalizing understanding, or contradict their interpretations, thus provoking renewed search for understanding.

Within this theoretical context, I hypothesized that academic deans would encounter plenty of “vague questions” and “muddy answers” while shaping academic priorities during the annual budget review at a public research university. As deans make sense of how to shape academic priorities, they would encounter a rich social context that included the academic and fiscal context of their university and college, including the university’s budget model (and accompanying governance structure) and the current academic standing and fiscal health of their college, and the perspectives and preferences of numerous university stakeholders, including senior central administrators such as the provost and other administrators in the provost’s office and administrators in their college such as associate deans and finance directors and the faculty in their college. Moreover, they would juxtapose this context with their professional identities as administrators and faculty, including their disciplinary backgrounds, professional experiences as administrators and faculty and personal identities and biographies.

## **Research Questions**

Within this theoretical context and research setting, my dissertation investigates the following central research question: *How do academic deans shape their college's academic priorities during university annual budget reviews?* In support of exploring this central question, I also explore the following corresponding questions:

- How do the academic and professional experiences of deans affect how they shape their college's academic priorities during annual budget reviews?
- How does a college's economic, political and social context affect how deans shape their college's academic priorities during annual budget reviews?
- How do a dean's relationships with key university stakeholders such as the provost and associate deans affect how deans shape their college's academic priorities during annual budget reviews?

## **Outline for Dissertation**

My dissertation consists of ten chapters, including this Introduction. In the next chapter, Literature Review, I analyze the research literature on four themes that are salient to my research questions. First, I analyze the literature on academic deans. Despite its shortcomings, the scant literature on academic deans suggests that the primary objective of deans is to maintain, if not improve, the quality of academic programs while balancing the budget of their colleges – a pursuit that echoes the central themes of my dissertation. Second, I analyze the literature on decentralized budget models in higher education, particularly the role of deans in these budget environments. This analysis demonstrates the extent to which academic deans serve as the chief academic and budget

officers of their colleges in decentralized, revenue-centered models. Third, I analyze the literature on sensemaking, reviewing its intellectual heritage and exploring empirical research that explores sensemaking. With this background in sensemaking, I then analyze the concept of sensegiving, reviewing its foundations and application in organization theory. I conclude this chapter by presenting a conceptual framework that describes the sensemaking of academic deans during university annual budget reviews.

In the third chapter, Research Methods, I explore the methodological assumptions that guide my dissertation. First, I explain how and why my dissertation is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, characterizing my approach to this research as “direct interpretive.” Second, I explore the principles of case study research that informed my theoretical sampling and selection of research methods. After describing the recruitment of participants, I detail my approach to data collection, which included conducting interviews and observations and collecting institutional documents. Before ending this chapter with a discussion of validity, I explore my approach to analyzing my data, which was disciplined by the principles of grounded theory.

After charting my conceptual and methodological foundation, I turn my attention to describing and explaining my findings. In Chapter 4, I present an institutional profile of my field site, Sprawling University, which is a pseudonym for a prominent public research university in the United States. After describing the university’s governance structure, I explain the key components of the university’s budget model, which is called the Campus Budget, including the distribution of authority between the provost and the academic deans. I describe the university’s fiscal environment, which has deteriorated over the past two decades, and the university’s response to increasing fiscal constraints,

including containing costs. To end this chapter, I explore the implications of continued fiscal stress at Sprawling University in the years to come.

In Chapter 5, I introduce six profiled deans who are featured throughout my dissertation – Dean Austen, Dean Conrad, Dean Huxley, Dean Joyce, Dean Stowe, Dean Swift. Before probing how these deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review at Sprawling University, which is the focus of subsequent chapters, I first explore how these deans more broadly conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities. In particular, I explore the extent to which a range of academic and professional experiences as well as the context of their college affects how the profiled deans conceive of their role in shaping academic priorities.

In Chapter 6, I turn my attention to exploring how the six profiled deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review at Sprawling University. In interviews and observations, authorship of an annual budget memorandum, which serves as an annual report for every college, emerges as the most important artifact of the annual budget review and the mechanism by which deans shape academic priorities during the budget review. I examine the different ways in which the deans compile and write – author – the budget memos of their colleges, specifying three different approaches that were adopted among the profiled deans. This finding sets the stage for subsequent chapters because different orientations to authorship engage individuals in colleges, particularly members of senior teams, with varying degrees of intensity. In authoring the budget memo, deans enact their budget authority during the budget review through several key activities, which I discuss in the chapter. Finally, I compare these approaches

to authorship of the budget memo with the espoused approaches of deans to shaping academic priorities that are examined in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 7, I explore an important way that some of the profiled deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review – leveraging authorship of the annual budget memo to establish a collective sense of academic priorities among their senior teams. I explain the ways that some deans leverage authorship in this fashion, arguing that these deans frame authorship as an occasion for collective sensemaking about potential priorities – interrogating past interpretations, assessing current impressions and imagining future implications. I also explore the negative consequences that stem from excluding members of senior teams from authorship of annual budget memo.

In Chapter 8, I further explore the behaviors of the profiled deans who establish a collective sense of academic priorities. These deans enact discursive practices in hopes of stimulating open dialogue and collective sensemaking with their senior teams. In some cases, these practices are specific behaviors that deans enact during meetings with their senior colleagues. In other cases, these practices are attitudes and expectations that deans establish with their colleagues in hopes of stimulating dialogue during meetings.

In Chapter 9, I explore a critical sensemaking exercise for academic deans during the annual budget review at Sprawling University – the extent to which the provost’s priorities for the university affect how the profiled deans shape academic priorities. During the annual budget review, the profiled deans enact a sense of interdependence with the provost’s office by aligning the priorities of their colleges with the provost’s priorities. I explore four ways that the deans demonstrate to the provost that their colleges are embracing and advancing the provost’s broader agenda for the university.

In the Discussion, I summarize my key research findings before exploring implications for future research and practice. I detail four areas of future research informed by my dissertation findings, including opportunities to examine accountability in decentralized budget models, sensemaking in meetings and the dynamics of senior administrative teams in colleges. Before articulating several key reflections about the work of academic deans, I describe three recommendations for practice that are informed by my findings, including recruiting and selecting deans, orientating academic deans to budget models and conducting self-studies of senior administrative teams.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Academic Deans**

The literature on academic deans is surprisingly scant, but it offers important insights that frame my dissertation research. This literature emphasizes that deans manage a diverse set of responsibilities. Most notably, academic deans often claim primary responsibility for the academic and financial affairs of their colleges (Dill, 1980; Krahenbuhl, 2004; Montez, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 2002; Morris, 1981; Rosser, Johnsrud, & Heck, 2003; Wolverton et al., 2001). Tucker and Bryan (1988), for example, underscore these core responsibilities in their analysis of the deanship for the American Council of Education. They devote their first chapter to exploring how deans should allocate finite financial resources across academic programs to maintain strong programs, strengthen weak programs and eliminate hopeless ones.

Over the past decade, scholars have explored, and substantiated, these core responsibilities of academic deans. As part of the National Study of Academic Deans Montez, Wolverton & Gmelch (2002) surveyed over 800 deans from research, master's and baccalaureate institutions about their most important activities. The surveyed deans identified three sets of activities – “internal productivity” (*e.g.*, “maintain effective communication across departments”), “academic personnel management” (*e.g.*, “recruit

and select chairs and faculty”) and external and political relations (*e.g.*, “develop and initiate long-range goals”) – as most important to the deanship; the mean scores for these three activities were all higher than 4.0 on a 5-point scale (pp. 246-250). When analyzing the future of the deanship, these deans identified “fiscal” activities (*e.g.*, “allocation and use of resources”), “administrative” activities (*e.g.*, “work with top administrators”) and “program development” activities (*e.g.*, development of curricula and programs) as the three most important future challenges for deans; more than 75 percent of the surveyed deans agreed that activities in these three domains – fiscal, administrative and program development – were the top three future challenges for deans (Montez, Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002, pp. 250-51).

Academics deans are expected to meet this objective of balancing academic and fiscal imperatives while juggling a complex set of responsibilities. Rosser, Johnsrud and Heck (2003), for example, surveyed faculty and administrative staff at a public research university about the effectiveness of deans across seven key leadership domains: “vision and goal setting”; “management of the unit”; “interpersonal relationships”; “communication skills”; “research, professional and community endeavors”; “quality of the unit's education”; and “support for institutional diversity” (p. 10). This study further validates the range of a dean’s work. A dean’s portfolio features a complex and diverse set of responsibilities across many functional areas, including student affairs and external relations such as fundraising, but the literature casts a clear portrait of a dean’s primary objective – maintaining if not improving academic programs while balancing the budget.

The literature identifies these primary responsibilities, but also indicates that academic deans navigate unique occupational hazards in pursuit of accomplishing them.



Most notably, academic deans in universities navigate a complex organization setting to fulfill their responsibilities. The organizational structure and culture of universities both enable and hinder the work of academic deans. On one hand, deans claim consequential formal authority in the academic bureaucracy. In their colleges, deans tend to have the authority to make countless decisions about managing and allocating existing fiscal resources, hunting down and securing new fiscal resources, recruiting and selecting faculty, initiating the evaluation of existing academic programs and the development of new academic programs, recruiting and developing chairs and associate deans and representing the college across and off campus (Montez, Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002; Rosser, Johnsrud & Heck, 2003).

On the other hand, academic deans tend to encounter circumscriptions on their authority. Historically, these restrictions reflect the organizational culture and structure of universities. Deans are situated within a professional bureaucracy and collegial culture that privileges faculty autonomy, academic freedom and shared governance (Birnbaum, 1988, 1992; Clark, 1983a, 1983b; Corson, 1960; Mintzberg, 1992; Rhoades, 2000; Ryan, 1980; Wisniewski, 1998; Montez, Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). Yarger (1998), for example, reminds us that while academic deans are expected to lead their colleges to “bigger and better things” – “few deans are hired with the mandate to maintain the status quo” – they cannot lead by issuing directives and edicts (p. 141). John Lombardi, who has served as the provost of Johns Hopkins University, chancellor of the University of Massachusetts – Amherst and president of Louisiana State University and University of Florida, characterizes academic deans as occupying a delicate nexus between the university’s “administrative shell” and its “academic core” or “faculty guild.” Deans

“know that their success depends on their ability to earn and retain the respect and support of their fellow guild members and to represent guild interests successfully in the competition for resources managed by the shell organization” (Lombardi, 2013, p. 8).

In straddling these boundaries, academic deans can find themselves serving multiple masters. Wolverton, Wolverton and Gmelch (1999), for example, describe deans as walking “a delicate administrative tightrope” (p. 81). Gary Krahenbuhl (2004), a longtime dean at Arizona State University, describes the tension as deans residing at a “crossroads of conflicting values and priorities”; the faculty considers deans as “too aggressive” whereas the provost considers deans “too passive” (p. 48). While some scholars prioritize the relationship between deans and department chairs (Tucker & Bryan, 1988), others emphasize the dean’s relationship with the provost (Gmelch, Wolverton, Wolverton & Sarros, 1999; Gumport, 1993; Hardy, 1990; Marcus, 1997; Roper & Deal, 2010). Krahenbuhl (2004), for example, argues that “a dean’s effectiveness (or lack thereof) depends heavily on the quality of his or her relationships with members of the upper administration,” especially the provost (p. 24).

The challenge of serving multiple masters can prove especially tenuous for academic deans at public universities. The literature reveals that deans encounter unique problems navigating the multiple audiences and competing priorities of public institutions (Conrad, 1978; Eckel, 2002; Gumport & Pusser, 1995; Hardy, 1990; Melchoir, 1982; Morphey, 2000; Rhoades, 2000; Rubin, 1979). Gumport (1993), for example, depicted deans at public universities as “subordinate administrators.” In her study of two public flagship research universities, deans were “victims of executive fiat” who were asked to rationalize the retrenchment plans of presidents and provosts. Deans were excluded from

initial retrenchment planning, but expected to translate containment targets into plans to eliminate programs, faculty and staff to satisfy the expectations of regents and state officials. In a different study, Gumport and Pusser (1999) present a similar set of tensions for deans at the University of Virginia during the 1990s. To appease the state legislature, central administrators withheld a portion of budgeted funds until colleges documented plans for long-range restructuring – and it was deans who were expected to design and implement these plans. The stress of navigating these competing expectations can take its toll on deans. One experienced dean in Gumport’s (1993) study confessed, “I think I had a good run for a while. The last few years began to fall apart ... I can’t pull off a decision. So many angles and restrictions. This place is almost ungovernable” (p. 295).

Despite these accounts of occupational hazards, the literature on academic deans indicates that deans are influential actors in universities. To achieve their ends, deans cannot rely solely on their bureaucratic authority. Dill (1980), reflecting on his experience as a dean at Syracuse University, described the deanship as a “leadership role with much heavier political and social than hierarchical and technical overtones” (p. 266). The dean, more so than any other person, can “improve the tone and performance of an entire school” by focusing and guiding the “contributions” of other administrators, faculty and staff (Dill, 1980, p. 275). While reflecting on his experience as a dean at the University of Illinois, Morris (1981) underscored the social dimensions of the deanship. He described deans as “the hub of the communications network” who “are capable of bringing individuals together on a continuing basis until jealousies are ameliorated or insecurities quieted” (p. 44). He coined the term “coolth” to describe this “deanly temperament.” The dean is “*in* but always slightly *above* the situation at hand ... the

quality of coolth therefore implies a steadiness of mood, a controlled repose under pressure, a mental orientation to tomorrow and next week in the face of this afternoon's setback" (Morris, 1981, p. 23, 24).

Over the past decade, quantitative research has substantiated these claims about the social components of the deanship. In a survey of 216 faculty at American research universities and liberal arts colleges, Bray (2008) finds that many of the behavioral norms faculty expect of deans involve communication skills, including "failure to communicate" (e.g., "faculty input is rarely sought on institutional direction or planning"), "unconveyed expectations" (e.g., does not accurately represent faculty views to the community") and "disdain for faculty input" (e.g., "often asks for, then goes against, faculty input for department direction"). These findings demonstrate that faculty look for deans to "listen to multiple and often discordant voices" and diagnose the "pulse of the strengths, weaknesses, problem spots across campus" (Bray, 2008, p. 713).

To achieve their objectives, deans need to collaborate and consult with faculty, staff and other administrators. Bray (2010) later argued that deans should "listen to faculty input, particularly on programmatic decisions" while planning and implementing initiatives (p. 307). Eckel (2002) also emphasized communication, revealing how a dean at the University of Maryland received a vote of no confidence from his faculty after dismissing their feedback on program restructuring. An administrator in the college attributed the dean's demise to an unwillingness to listen to the faculty. "It was a college decision, but it was very much driven by the dean ... the model that was developed was not really endorsed by the faculty ... He was mandating something, and they were telling him something else, and he was unwilling to compromise" (Eckel, 2002, p. 251).

This emphasis on communicating with different stakeholders also illustrates the political realities of the deanship. Roper and Deal (2010) observed, “Effective deans listen attentively to presidents, provosts, faculty members, students, and other stakeholders. They get a preliminary reading on support for and opposition to their ideas” (p. 15). This characterization resembles Clark’s (1983a, 1983b) contention that wise deans “carry the field” to influence organizational change by supporting the nascent initiatives of department chairs and faculty. Similarly, Stark and her colleagues (1997) differentiated dean-*initiated* change from dean-*advocated* change while examining curriculum planning at a large public university. As advocates, deans were found to provide “the wind that is necessary to fill the sails of change” (Stark et al, 1997, p. 121).

In contrast to woeful depictions, research on organizational change and retrenchment further depicts deans as exerting significant power. This literature often underscores the power of deans (Baldrige, 1971; Eckel, 2002; Gates, 1997; Porter, Zemsky, & Oedel, 1979). In studies of strategic planning at a public research university, Gioia and colleagues (1994, 1996) found that the president worried about “provoking” the deans “who were seen as potentially crippling adversaries in launching any change” (Gioia et al, 1994, p. 372). In response, the president prioritized symbolic actions that would not alienate deans. Marcus (1997) also illustrates the gumption of deans at one public university, finding that they defied planning directives of provosts by waiting for them to leave the institution. “Once a provost left ... deans typically reasserted their power and exercised ‘pocket vetoes’ over portions of the old provost’s plan that they did not wish to implement” (Marcus, 1997, p. 62). In a study of four public universities, Rhoades (2000) actually discovered that deans negotiated with provosts for new

resources, striking deals that were “counter to the publicly proclaimed strategic efforts of the central administration (and of their colleges)” (p. 49).

Hardy (1990) presents one of the most detailed analyses of the role deans during retrenchment in her investigation of budget cuts at University of British Columbia and University of Toronto. Although deans were excluded from initial planning discussions – at the University of British Columbia, the provost wrote deans asking them to “show cause” for not closing programs – they managed to stymie the plans of central administrators to eliminate programs. Deans, for example, exerted “monopoly” control over budgetary and enrollment data; they delayed informational requests from central administrators or only provided data that portrayed vulnerable programs in positive ways. Deans at the University of British Columbia defended vulnerable programs in public forums whereas deans at the University of Toronto “disassociated themselves from the problem, leaving it in the hands of central administration,” which forced presidents and provosts to justify cuts to the faculty (Hardy, 1990, p. 315). One central administrator begrudgingly acknowledged the savvy of deans. “In retrospect, the cuts were determined by how persuasive particular deans ... were ... A strong, persuasive dean is likely to get off easier than he would if it were judged on need or quality” (Hardy, 1990, p. 313).

Despite its occupational hazards, the deanship, therefore, is far from hapless. Deans shape the interpretation and definition of issues and problems by consulting and collaborating with individuals inside their college and across their institution. In this way, deans are brokers of meaning in their colleges, mastering the cultural and symbolic realms. Tierney (1989), for example, recommended that deans focus on the “constant interpretation of one constituency to another” more than “abstract management

principles” (p. 119, 120). Similarly, Dill (1980) advises deans to “pull together a sense of what they ... have come together to do and a specification of the participants and contributions for them that will enable things to get done” (266). By focusing attention on the meaning of events, deans seize considerable influence over framing the problems of their colleges. “Without flourish or raised voice – pushing here, complimenting there, rearranging options as more individuals are consulted, and eventually bringing the elements and individuals to a culmination that will be seen as opening up new and more personally satisfying spheres of activities for those involved” (Morris, 1981, p. 23).

### **Academic Deans in Decentralized Budget Models**

Over the past two decades, a notable change at many public and private research universities has increased the authority of deans – the implementation of decentralized, revenue-centered budget models. These budget models situate budgetary authority, including control over resource allocation, in individual units, colleges or schools rather than in the president’s or provost’s office. Historically, central administrators at public universities have distributed resources to academic units from a fund of revenues comprised of state appropriations and tuition and fees (Goldstein & Meisinger, 2005). In this previous framework, the provost would determine funding allocations for colleges based on some increment of the previous year’s budget.

In contrast, with decentralized, revenue-centered budget models, individual academic units directly receive most revenues generated through tuition and fees, research grants and other activities; and at public universities, state appropriations are distributed to units by the provost’s (or president’s) office according to a predetermined

formula. A number of different terms are used to describe these revenue-centered approaches – Responsibility Center Management (RCM), Incentive Based Budgeting Systems (IBBS) and Value Centered Management (VCM) – but budget models bearing these monikers share the core characteristic of situating most budgetary authority in individual academic units (Hearn et al., 2006; Massy, 1996). This framework for budgeting has been adopted by prominent public and private research universities over the past three decades, ranging from Harvard University to Indiana University to the University of Southern California to UCLA (Strauss & Curry, 2002).

An enduring image of decentralized, revenue-centered budget models is "every tub on its own bottom." The central premise of these budget models is that academic deans, as directors of academic units, can make more informed decisions about resource allocation for academic operations than central administrators because colleges are closer to the point at which revenues are generated and costs are incurred at the university (Lasher & Sullivan, 2005). In this decentralized framework, academic deans become more like chief executive officers who possess authority and responsibility over academic and budgetary affairs in their colleges and less like middle managers who implement the academic and financial strategies of the provost or president. "Plenty of bean counters are available to make [income] estimate[s]. But only a school's dean – the person in charge – can weigh the easily measured income result against the imponderables associated with reduced enrollments versus an additional colleague" (Whalen, 1991, p. 145). With this local perspective, deans can become more entrepreneurial in developing courses and programs that might attract more students and encouraging research projects that might



attract more grants. It “provides an environment in which deans can bring to bear their incomparable expertise in making choices about their programs” (Whalen, 1991, p. 145).

Correspondingly, the implementation of decentralized, revenue-centered budget models shifts the academic and fiscal responsibilities of central administrators. The provost shifts their responsibility from managing detailed budgetary inputs in colleges to establishing “academic performance expectations within reasonable resource constraints” for colleges and holding “deans accountable for academic and fiscal outcomes” in their colleges (Curry, 1991, p. 183). A former senior administrator who led the design and implementation of decentralized budgeting at the University of Southern California argued that the “trick” for provosts is to create a system “loosely coupled enough to sustain faculty and decanal entrepreneurship,” yet “tightly coupled enough to create a sense of the whole, a sense of bonding commonality, of one university” (Curry, 1991, p. 194). In this framework, the provost comes to realize that the budget model “does not manage itself”; their role becomes “presiding” over the budget model “with the consent of the governed” or the deans in the colleges (Whalen, 2002, p. 21).

Decentralized, revenue-centered budget models offer several potential benefits for universities. First, these models promise more flexibility than traditional incremental budgeting models. Deans enjoy the autonomy to adapt to the specific environment of their college, which enables them to pursue opportunities such as creating new programs and attracting new students (Fuller, Morton & Korschgen, 2005). This flexibility also extends to managing dimensions of the college’s budget. If one department does not meet its enrollment projections for the year, for example, the dean can shift funds from other departments to cover revenue shortfalls (Stocum & Rooney, 1997). By design, colleges

can also carry forward balances from year to year, which creates an incentive to generate additional revenues while containing costs (Priest, 2002). With surpluses, deans can fund academic initiatives such as investing in new classroom and research facilities, developing new programs and recruiting faculty (Massy, 1996; Whalen, 2002).

Second, these decentralized budget frameworks promise more transparency than the “black box” of incremental budgeting models. The model, for example, exposes the extent to which colleges can operate self-sufficiently by detailing the revenues and costs of each unit. This knowledge helps central administrators such as the provost determine whether they should offer subsidies, or “subventions,” to some colleges (Strauss & Curry, 2002). Moreover, the “taxes” charged to units from central administration and cross-subsidies that span colleges usually reflect predetermined formulas that are known across the university. In the words of one educational consultant, “At a time of lean budgets and difficult decisions, people think of RCM as a way to make clear why they get money when they get the money” (Carlson, 2015, para 9).

Decentralized budget models, however, also present hazards for colleges. First, academic deans are rarely recruited and selected for their financial acumen, especially at research universities, but the revenue-centered framework requires them to possess at least some “appetite” to learn and demonstrate keen financial and managerial skills (Lang, 2002). Strauss and Curry (2002) underscore this point, cautioning, “entrepreneurial systems do not necessarily create entrepreneurs” (p. 32). Similarly, Zemsky, Porter and Odel (1978) foresaw this potential pitfall of decentralized budget models, arguing that “weak deans” can undermine the fiscal health of colleges (p. 252).

Second, the decentralization of budget authority places new pressures on financial administrators in colleges (Priest, St. John & Tobin, 2002). Hearn et al (2006), for example, offered evidence that a lack of financial acumen and management skills among academic deans and their budget administrators was a critical vulnerability of decentralized budget models. Strauss and Curry (2002) recommend surrounding deans with skilled finance directors, asserting, “Smart amateurs who have grown from administrative assistants into local budget managers won’t be good enough” (p. 35).

Third, colleges, and their deans, are expected to live with the financial consequences of their actions. As their own "responsibility centers," colleges are expected to generate revenues and contain costs; and balances, whether positive or negative, are carried over into the next year (Priest, 2002; Curry, Laws & Strauss, 2013). Proponents of centralized, revenue-centered budget models tout the potential benefits of accruing surpluses that can be reinvested into academic initiatives, but they also concede that these models can generate deficits for colleges, even if they tend to dwell on the potential windfall of these models.

### **Sensemaking**

The concept of sensemaking explores how individuals navigate uncertainty and ambiguity by creating plausible images of reality to guide and rationalize their action. Among “a million things that go on” and the “clusters of things that go wrong,” what does the situation mean and what should I do? (Weick et al, 2005, p. 411). Taylor and Van Every (2000) echo these themes, describing sensemaking as “turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard

for action (p. 40). Authorship is central to sensemaking. “Situations, organizations, and environments are talked into existence” (Weick et al, 2005, p. 409). Brown et al (2014) underscore this emphasis on authorship, arguing that sensemaking “involves not merely interpretation and meaning production but the active authoring of the situations in which reflective actors are embedded and are attempting to comprehend” (p. 267). Sensemaking entails more than interpretation because it explores how individuals differentiate among cues and more than decision making because it entails ongoing flows of experience rather than discrete events (Weick, 1995; Weick et al, 2005).

A rich theoretical foundation from psychology and sociology informs the concept of sensemaking. Among other scholarship, it draws on Mead’s (1934) and Blumer’s (1969) symbolic interactionism, Berger and Luckman’s (1967) and Garfinkel’s (1967) social constructions of reality, Cooley’s (1902) identity construction of the “looking-glass self,” Schutz’s (1967) notion of “meaningful lived experience,” Dewey’s (1910) emphasis on interruptions (and recoveries), Goffman’s (1974) frame analysis, Mead’s (1956) and Starbuck and Milliken’s (1988) articulations of hindsight bias, Follett’s (1924) conception of “relatings” as combining action with retrospect, Albert and Whetten’s (1985) description of identity construction, Winograd and Flores’ (1986) interpretation of “thrownness” from Heidegger, James’ (1890/1950) emphasis on extracted cues or “character,” and Festinger’s (1957) and Staw’s (1980, 1981) extensions of cognitive dissonance.

In particular, much of the conceptual origin of sensemaking can be traced to the concepts of symbolic interactionism and social construction. In her model of sensemaking in organizational entry, Louis (1980) applies Berger and Luckman’s (1967)

idea of individuals internalizing context-specific dictionaries of meaning (p. 138). Weick (1995) credits Harold Garfinkel's (1967) research on juries as an early inspiration for sensemaking, especially the observation that juries determine a verdict *before* deciding on the case's essential facts (pp. 10-11). In a passage that could easily appear in subsequent research on sensemaking, Garfinkel (1967) explains, "[Decision making in daily life] may be much more preoccupied with the problem of assigning outcomes their legitimate history than with questions of deciding before the actual occasion of choice the conditions under which one, among a set of alternative possible courses of actions, will be elected" (pp. 114-115).

In fact, Weick refers to symbolic interactionism as the "unofficial theory of sensemaking." An examination of Blumer's definition of symbolic interactionism foreshadows eventual articulations of sensemaking. He writes,

1) individuals act toward others, institutions, activities, and objects based on the personal meaning of these things; 2) the meaning of these things derive from social interactions; and 3) these meanings are modified through an interpretative process used by individuals while encountering and engaging these other people, institutions, activities, or objects (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

This last premise begins to reveal the relationship between symbolic interactionism and sensemaking by articulating a continual social-cognitive process that guides action.

The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in the light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action ... interpretation should not be regarded as a mere automatic application of established meanings but as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action (Blumer, 1969, p. 5).

Symbolic interactionism integrates “a crucial set of elements” that shape sensemaking, including “self, action, interaction, interpretation, meaning, and joint action” (Weick, 1995, p. 41).

From this rich theoretical foundation, Karl Weick (1979, 1995, 2005) articulated the key dimensions of sensemaking as a distinct organizational concept. Weick (1995) identifies seven sensemaking “resources” or properties – *social context, identity, retrospect, salient cues, ongoing projects, plausibility, and enactment*. The following paragraphs describe each of these properties.

*Social Context.* The property of social context underscores the relational nature of sensemaking. The moniker “sensemaking” might evoke solitary images of individuals thinking, but sensemaking integrates thinking *and* social interaction. “Sensemaking is never solitary because what a person does internally is contingent on others” (Weick, 1995, p. 40). In outlining social context, Weick quotes a central passage from Blumer’s articulation of symbolic interactionism. “Human beings in interacting with one another have to take account of what each other is doing or is about to do ... The actions of others enter to set what one plans to do, may oppose or prevent such plans, and may demand a very different set of such plans” (Blumer, 1969, p. 8). With sensemaking, “interacting” often means communication, particularly talk. Taylor and Van Every (2000) describe “interactive talk” as enabling “a situation to be talked into existence” providing the foundation of subsequent action (p. 58). Not surprisingly, breakdowns in communication undermine sensemaking, as vividly illustrated in Weick’s depictions of the Tenerife runway collision (1990) and the Mann Gulch fire (1993). Conceptions of social context

often allude to face-to-face interactions, but it also includes other actions that presume an audience such as monologues (Blumer, 1969; Weick, 1995).

*Identity.* The property of identity emphasizes that the construction of meaning depends on individual needs for self-enhancement, self-efficacy and self-consistency (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Coopey et al, 1997; Weick, 1995). “We are led not by what *is*, but who we *are* ... Who we *are*, and the world we *know*, are two aspects of the same thing” (Thayer, 1988, p. 59). Answers to these questions reveal the extent to which individuals demonstrate mutable identities, choosing to enact different identities in different interactions (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). “The sensemaker is ... an ongoing puzzle undergoing continual redefinition, coincident with presenting some self to others and trying to decide which self is appropriate” (Weick, 1995, p. 20). Along with social context, therefore, identity informs the sensemaking process for individuals. “Who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 416).

*Retrospect.* Our meaning of *past* experiences shapes sensemaking *now* and in the *future*. Individuals reflexively examine their actions to discover the implications and meaning of these actions. In describing how retrospect relates to Schutz’s conception of “meaningful lived experience,” Weick (1995) asserts, “The key word in that phrase, *lived*, is stated in the past tense to capture the reality that people can know what they are doing only after they have done it” (p. 24). He elaborates by evoking Mead’s articulation of hindsight bias, “Actions are known only when they have been completed, which

means we are always a little behind or our actions are always a bit ahead of us” (Weick, 1995, p. 26). Attention to retrospect also sensitizes us to the likelihood that past experiences prove equivocal due to an abundance of sense rather than an absence of sense (Weick, 1995, p. 27).

*Salient Cues.* The property of salient cues posits that individuals affirm their hunches of situations by selectively discriminating data. Individuals “interpret and explain set of cues from their environments (Maitlis, 2005, p. 21). Individuals establish and then elaborate connections between “a particular” and “a category” into more confident diagnoses of situations through “successive rounds of selective search for confirming evidence” (Weick, 2008, p. 1403). Noticing and bracketing are aspects of sensemaking, but are not synonymous with it. Starbuck and Milliken (1988) and Weick (1995) delineate between noticing and sensemaking: noticing refers to the activities of filtering, classifying and comparing, whereas sensemaking entails a more interpretative exercise of assigning meaning to cues. The genesis of salient cues often occurs when an individual “notices” and “brackets” some possible “sign of trouble” from the social context (Weick et al, 2005, p. 411). It is the social context that makes a cue germane to sensemaking. “The social context binds people to behavior through a process of commitment, affects the saliency of information about their past activities, and provides norms and expectations that constrain their rationalization or justification of those activities” (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978, p. 233).

*Plausibility.* Plausibility implies that individuals mediate uncertainty by accepting or “settling” for plausible accounts over accurate or complete accounts of situations. An impulse to act accompanies the question of “what’s the story here?”; and



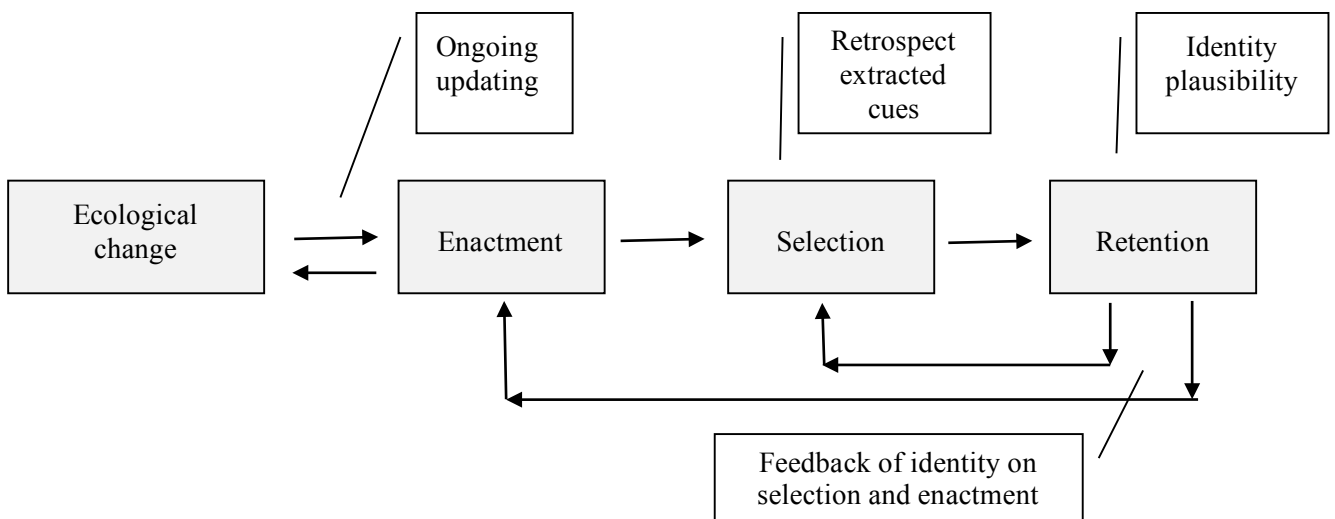
attempts to answer this question evokes adequate meaning to guide action (Weick, 2008). Similarly, Chia (2000) describes translating the “intractable or obdurate into a form that is more amenable to functional deployment” (p. 517). “Functional deployment,” in other words, prioritizes the usability of an interpretation over its precision (James, 1907; Weick, 1995). Yet the pursuit of accuracy remains essential for sustaining motivation in the search for meaning. “People may get better stories, but they will never get *the* story” (Weick et al, 2005, p. 415). Weick (1995) explains, “A good story holds disparate elements together long enough to energize and guide action, plausibly enough to allow people to make retrospective sense of whatever happens, and engagingly enough that others will contribute their own inputs in the interest of sensemaking” (p. 61).

*Enactment.* Sensemaking is about action. “If the first question of sensemaking is ‘what’s going on here?,’ the second equally important question is ‘what do I do next?’” (Weick et al, 2005, p. 412). Sensemaking envisions an environment that is more dynamic than inert; individuals co-construct their environments and then navigate its opportunities and constraints (Weick, 1995; Weick et al, 2005). Follet (1924) asserts, “we are neither the master nor slave of our environment” (p. 118), hinting at a reciprocal relationship between enactment and the environment. Enactment evokes the “action science” notion of Argyris, Putnam and Smith (1985): “‘Act and reflect on your action.’ This is almost a reversal of the conventional model, and might be caricatured as, ‘act before you think’ ... Action produced information that can be used for the design of future action” (p. 52). Far from a passive process, sensemaking requires individuals to ask questions, make declarations and try on behaviors to infer meaning from situations.

*Ongoing Projects.* The property of ongoing sensitizes us to “thrownness” or the constant flow of experience. Gephart et al (2010) reminds us, "there is no time out for sensemaking" (p. 281). Instead individuals “bracket” moments from this constant flow (Schutz, 1967) or “chop moments out of continuous flows and extract cues from those moments” (Weick, 1995, p. 43). Individuals conceive events more than discover them; we “stabilize the streaming of experience” by bounding portions of flow into events. Organizational life presents countless examples of how we are immersed in the flow of experience (Mintzberg, 1973; Weick et al, 2005). Paget (1988), for example, claimed, “an act becomes a mistake only after it has already gone wrong. As it is unfolding, it is not becoming mistaken at all; it is becoming” (p. 56).

These seven resources form the conceptual foundation of sensemaking. The descriptions above foreshadow relationships among the properties. Figure 1 (below), which displays these properties within the context of organizing (Jennings & Greenwood, 2003; Weick et al, 2005), begins to detail some of these relationships.

Figure 1: The Relationship Among Enactment, Organizing and Sensemaking



This enactment-selection-retention model presents a variation of Campbell's (1965, 1997) evolutionary epistemology. It illustrates that sensemaking reflects reciprocal exchanges between individuals (*i.e.*, Enactment) and their environments (*i.e.*, Ecological Change) that are made meaningful (*i.e.*, Selection) and preserved over time (*i.e.*, Retention). This relationship between the environment and enactment reflects reactions to ambiguity and discrepancies in an ongoing flow of experience that ultimately begins to shape the meaning of events into more coherent accounts. The process of selection reduces the number of possible meanings of situations into an emerging plausible story. During the process of retention, this provisional story begins to take form; its durability increases if it relates to past experience (*i.e.*, "retrospect"), connects to individual identities and begins to guide action and interpretation. This model underscores that sensemaking reflects an ongoing process of individuals authoring and refining meaning out of enacted action.

Over the past two decades, sensemaking has emerged as a compelling framework for investigating organizational life. Research on sensemaking often explored individual and organizational responses to crises and disasters, including Weick's seminal research on the Mann Gulch forest fire and the Tenerife runway collision (Kayes, 2004; Weick, 1990, 1993; Wicks, 2002). Yet other studies have investigated sensemaking during less dire episodes, particularly organizational change (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 1994; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Despite obvious differences in consequences, disasters and change arouse similar emotions in individuals: unanticipated confrontations interrupt established patterns of action, which in turn

triggers anxiety and confusion and complicates consideration of future action (Maitlis & Senseshein, 2010).

Scholars have explored the social dimensions of sensemaking. In their literature review, Maitlis and Christianson (2014) echo Weick's earlier emphasis on the role of language, describing it as a "building block of sensemaking" (p. 7). Brown, Stacey and Nandhakumar (2008) echo this emphasis on language. "To make sense is to organize, and sensemaking refers to the process of organizing using the technology of language ... to identify, regularize, and routinize memories into plausible explanations and, indeed, whole narratives" (p. 1055). Similarly, Boje (1991) claims narrative as the "preferred sensemaking currency" (p. 106). Numerous studies have revealed the discursive and narrative dimensions of sensemaking (Brown, 2005; Dunford & Jones, 2000; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Patriotta & Spedale, 2009). Balogun and Johnson (2005), for example, argued that sensemaking shaped the outcomes of organizational change through a series of vertical and lateral verbal processes in their investigation of middle managers at a recently privatized utility company. A diverse set of interactions shaped sensemaking – discussing and writing formal policy documents, preparing and listening to formal presentations and engaging in informal gossip with colleagues.

Research on organizational change has also explored how individual notions of identity shape sensemaking. In their analysis of an IT project development team, Brown, Stacey and Nandhakumar (2008) found that designers constructed narratives of the project's history that preserved and enhanced their self-esteem. Members of the team demonstrated an "attributional egotism"; individuals assigned positive outcomes to themselves and negative outcomes to external factors. The team's lead designer, for

example, credited the initial look and feel of a game to his expertise, but blamed the team's lead artist for the game's eventual (poor) aesthetic appeal. Team members made sense of project failures by imposing "a formal coherence on equivocal happenings in ways which supported preferred versions of their selves, supporting self-esteem and perceptions of self-efficacy" (Brown, Stacey & Nandhakumar, 2008, p. 1053). Similar to the existential crisis of the firefighters at Mann Gulch (Weick, 1993) – the call to drop their tools undermined their identity as firefighters – Wicks (2002) found that the identity of miners as "real men" and "providers" limited their ability to acknowledge the inherent danger of their work.

In addition to revealing the importance of identity and language with sensemaking, research on organizational change has demonstrated that sensemaking can feature different temporal orientations. On one hand, the conceptual development of sensemaking underscores the importance of the past – retrospect – on the sensemaking of individuals. In describing the nature of retrospect, Weick evoked the image of glancing backward to understand the meaning of events (p. 26). Yet Weick (1995) also argued that sensemaking can extend "beyond the present" (p. 29). "Present decisions can be made meaningful in a larger context than they usually are and more of the past and future can be brought to bear to inform them" (Weick, 1995, p. 29). In their study of a strategic planning task force at an American public research university, Gioia et al (1994) developed this idea of "anticipatory" or "prospective sensemaking" (p. 378). They found that members of the committee tried "to infer the future consequences of proposed actions as a way of understanding their present situation" (p. 378). "The conscious and intentional consideration of the probable future impact of certain actions" focused "the

meaning construction processes” of committee members as (Gioia et al, 1994, p. 378). Gioia and Mehra (1996) advanced this idea of prospective sensemaking, arguing, “prospecting means looking for something ... prospective sense making is aimed at creating meaningful opportunities for the future. In a loose sense, it is an attempt to structure the future by imagining some desirable (albeit ill-defined) state” (p. 1229).

### **Sensegiving**

Sensegiving describes how individuals try to influence the sensemaking of others. It implies that leaders *can* persuade individuals to understand and adopt a preferred definition of reality (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Weick et al, 2005). Sensegiving suggests that a critical activity of senior leaders is constructing and managing meaning within organizations (Pfeffer, 1981; Pondy et al, 1982; Podolny, Khurana & Hill-Opper, 2005; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Thayer (1988) vividly described this role in interpreting and shaping meaning, saying,

A leader at work is one who gives others a different sense of the *meaning* that which they do by recreating it in a different form, a different ‘face’ ... The leader is a *sense-giver*. The leader always *embodies* the possibilities of escape from what might otherwise appear to us to be incomprehensible, or from what might otherwise appear to us to be a chaotic, indifferent, or incorrigible world – one over which we have no ultimate control (p. 250, 254).

Similarly, Smircich and Morgan (1982) offered another early articulation of sensegiving, arguing, “The actions and utterances of leaders frame and shape the context of action in such a way that the members of that context are able to use the meaning thus created as a point of reference for their own action and understanding of the situation” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, p. 261).

The concept of sensegiving might have been coined in the 1980s, but its focus embodies a rich tradition from organizational theory. Numerous organizational theorists (Barnard, 1938/1968; Selznick, 1957/1984; Weber, 1946, 1978) have emphasized the role of leaders in developing a sense of meaning for individuals inside (and outside) organizations. In *The Functions of the Executive*, Chester Barnard not only asserted that an organization's survival depends on the ability of executives to develop efficient processes, but also to establish a common sense of organizational purpose and a means for communicating that purpose. "The function of formulating grand purposes and providing for their definition is one which needs sensitive systems of communication, experience in interpretation, imagination" (Barnard, 1968, p. 233). Selznick (1957/1984) echoed Barnard's assertion that leaders not only need to prioritize technical efficiency – at a minimum, organizations are "an expendable tool, a rational instrument engineered to do a job" or "lean, no-nonsense system[s] of consciously co-coordinated activities" (p. 5) – but also to establish a sense of meaning and purpose beyond economic gains. Selznick (1984) envisioned leaders infusing their organizations with "values beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand" to create a sense of meaning that could provide individuals a sense of purpose and direction (p. 17).

Over the past thirty years, American higher education has served as a prominent empirical setting for the development of sensegiving. Whetten (1984), for example, articulated a nascent conception of sensegiving in *Change*, a higher education magazine. "What distinguishes truly effective administrators is their ability to create the inspirational vision that can become the core of a[n] ... strategic plan" (p. 42). Gioia and colleagues (1991, 1994, 1996) advanced the concept while examining how a new

president revealed his strategy for an American public research university. The president constructed a strategic vision – transforming the university into a “top 10” public research university – “that stakeholders and constituents could be influenced to comprehend, accept, and act upon to initiate desired changes” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 444). The president used “hypothetical scenarios” to unveil his nascent vision for enhancing his institution’s research reputation, which both shaped the parameters of change and ensured that a broad set of stakeholders provided feedback on his proposals.

From this investigation, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) developed a four-phase sensegiving process. First, *envisioning* entails a chief executive developing an initial guiding vision. Second, *signaling* involves this executive declaring these parameters in public forums and meetings with stakeholders; an essential element of this phase is “injecting” ambiguity throughout the organization in order to supplant the status quo through this new vision. Third, *revisioning* occurs when individuals make sense of the proposed change, which eventually prompts the executive to modify the initial vision to reflect stakeholder feedback. Fourth, *energizing* entails the executive publicly communicating a refined vision with a broader set of stakeholders and continuing to modify the vision as stakeholders provide more feedback. This engagement of a broadening set of stakeholders solidifies a broader organizational commitment to change. Their model indicates that sensemaking and sensegiving transpire sequentially and reciprocally with alternating periods of “understanding” and “influencing” and correspondingly, “cognition” and “action” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 444).

Over the past decade, organizational scholars have refined these conceptions of sensegiving. First, scholars question the extent to which the sensegiving of chief



executives defines the sensemaking of others (Bartunek et al, 1999; Corvellec & Risberg, 2007; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). In their analysis of organizational change in Boston's city government, Bartunek and colleagues (1999) concluded, "achieving acceptance of a vision is likely to be a complex process involves multiple, perhaps conflicting, and evolving understandings" (p. 67). The existence of these competing understandings complicates the extent to which senior executives guide meaning. The intentional persuasive acts of leaders – making messages appear reasonable and logical, using rewards and sanctions, appealing to the values and norms of the receiver and demonstrating the credibility of the sender (*e.g.*, highlighting political connections) – does not always shape the sensemaking of others (Bartunek et al, 1999).

Second, other scholars caution that the term sensegiving "reifies" sense, which obscures the inherent social construction of sensemaking. In their investigation of Swedish "wind farmers" applying for utility permits, Corvellic and Risberg (2007) rejected a "sender-centric view[s] of sense" because "it is non-sensical to speak of sense without referring to interpretation and, thus, to a living audience" (p. 322). Instead they defined sensegiving as an activity aimed at influencing audiences toward a preferred definition of reality. By articulating sensegiving as more verb than noun – they invoke the French word of *mise-en-scène* that means "setting the stage" or "putting into scene" – Corvellic and Risberg (2007) prioritized the central activities of sensegiving such as "stage-setting" and "direction-providing," downplaying the importance of who conducts these activities. This research affirms the importance of sensemaking and sensegiving in organizational life, but contends that senior executives do not monopolize these activities.

Similarly, other scholars have questioned the locus of sensegiving in organizations. Although it *can* originate at the apex of hierarchies, sensegiving might often emerge among middle managers (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2010; Westley, 1990). In their study of three symphony orchestras, Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) asserted that a “bounded responsibility” determines whether stakeholders other than senior executives engage in sensegiving; other stakeholders tend to intervene if a problem or issue is important to themselves or the whole organization *and* senior leaders are considered incapable of addressing the problem. This “sensemaking imperative” tended to emerge with the “perception or anticipation of a sensemaking gap” and circumstances that offered salient expertise, some form of legitimate authority and forums to engage in sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007).

In particular, middle managers have opportunities to initiate sensegiving. Rouleau and Balogun (2010), for example, argued that middle managers are better poised as sensegivers than chief executives because they are intimately familiar with the social context of organizations or the “complex mosaic of underlying knowledge” (p. 5). Middle managers shape crucial sensemaking activities – prioritizing certain cues, defining the legitimacy of certain problems and potential solutions and activating elements of individual and group identities (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Maitlis, 2005; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Rouleau & Balogun, 2010). Opportunities abound for middle managers to shape meaning through formal and informal social interactions. Middle managers not only make formal presentations in meetings, but also talk with their colleagues in a range of informal, everyday social interactions such as swopping secrets and stories,

scrutinizing nonverbal gestures and patching together puzzling fragments of information (Balogun & Johnson, 2005).

The discursive skills of middle managers, therefore, are essential to their sensegiving. In their study of restructuring across numerous industries, Rouleau and Balogun (2010) found that two discursive activities – “setting the scene” and “performing the conversation” – are central to the sensegiving efforts of middle managers. By “performing the conversation,” managers crafted the words and appropriated symbols associated with desired interpretations such as using “cost” and “margin” to relate changing policies to the organization’s bottom-line culture or inviting experts to company-wide forums and then asking for their advice at decisive moments in presentations. By “setting the scene,” middle managers mobilized network “formats,” assembling the right collection of colleagues in the right format to influence their preferred interpretations of organizational change, whether it was writing reports and then seeking feedback from specific individuals or “bumping into” targeted colleagues.

Sensegiving not only depends on leveraging clever discursive techniques, but also situating such practices in a specific social context. “To engage in sensegiving, they [stakeholders] must tell sensible stories (drawing on relevant expertise) at the right time and place (opportunity) and occupy a social position that leads others to listen (legitimacy)” (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p. 79). This skill resembles what Dutton and colleagues called “issue selling” (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al, 2001) and how Kanter (1983) characterized middle managers as “change masters.” Dutton et al. (2001), for example, illustrated that middle managers pursued three types of “moves” to shape the “attention allocation” of their organizations: “packaging” moves such as connecting

or “bundling” an issue to other organizational issues or objectives; “involvement” moves such as careful consideration of targeting specific individuals in formal or informal settings; and “process” moves such as knowing when to aggressively advocate an issue and when to hold back (pp. 721-727). They not only underscore that sensegiving demands a keen sense of political acumen, but also affirm that shaping the interpretations of issues and problems are not the sole province of senior executives.

Sensegiving, therefore, might be best understood as a reciprocal process whereby chief executives, middle managers and other individuals co-construct meanings of organizational reality. In her study of a symphony orchestra, Maitlis (2005) identifies four forms of sensegiving or “organizational sensemaking.” These different forms are defined by differences in the extent to which leaders tried to “control” and “animation” sensemaking across the organization. First, in “guided” sensemaking, leaders actively construct and promote interpretations of issues while stakeholders try to shape impressions about specific issues or problems. Leaders, for example, organized private meetings with different groups of stakeholders to engage in planned sensegiving activities, which in turn generated consistent accounts of reality.

In “fragmented” sensemaking, leaders seek the perspectives of stakeholders, but without integrating a coherent account. Maitlis likens this form to Weick’s (1993) “collapse of sensemaking”; a fragmented sensemaking process generates multiple yet narrow accounts, which undermines opportunities to create shared meanings in hopes of guiding collective action. In “restricted” sensemaking, leaders engage in sensegiving where they proclaim accounts of reality, but without stakeholders attempting to provide alternative constructions. This narrow form of sensemaking generates a dominant

interpretation of an issue that only reflects the perspectives of senior leaders. The fourth form of organizational sensemaking, “minimal,” occurs when leaders and stakeholders engage in low levels of sensegiving, which as a result, generates only superficial understandings of issues.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Insights from research on sensemaking and sensegiving, along with insights from the research on academic deans and decentralized budget models, begin to specify how deans might shape academic priorities during university annual budget reviews. The concept of sensemaking focuses on dynamic notions of making sense of environments rather than static notions of making decisions. As individuals strive to understand situations, they engage an interplay of sensemaking “resources” – social context, identity, retrospect, salient cues, plausibility, ongoing projects and enactment (Weick, 1995). Individuals, for example, might extract cues from their social context, striving to construct a plausible definition of a situation. In this pursuit, individuals reflexively privilege interpretations that affirm their identities and corroborate their past experiences. With this nascent understanding, individuals begin to enact behaviors; through these actions, which test the plausibility of their understanding, individuals encounter reactions that either validate their interpretations, thus crystalizing understanding, or contradict their interpretations, thus provoking renewed search for understanding.

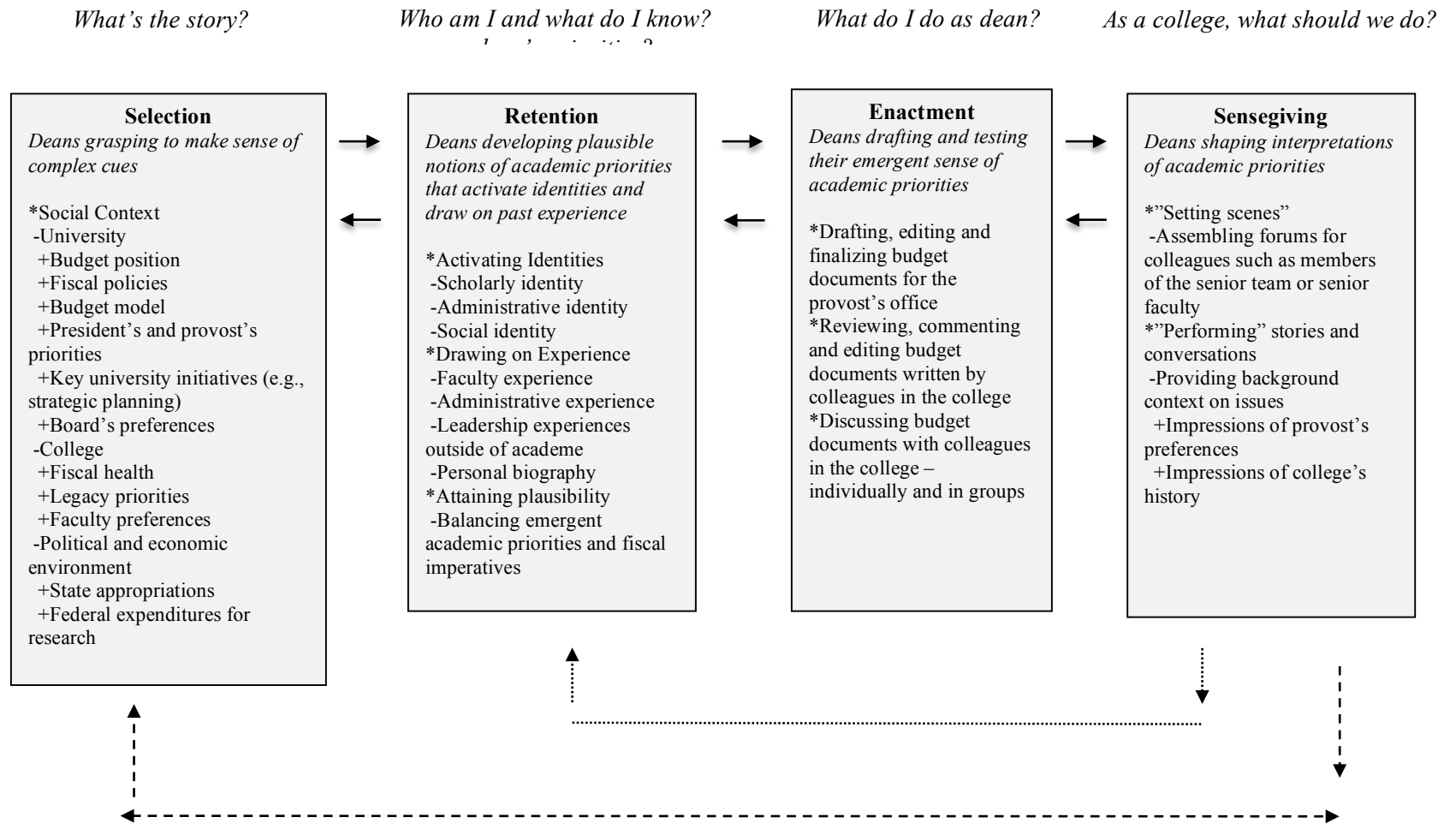
Within this theoretical context, I hypothesized that academic deans at a public research university would experience a similar interplay among sensemaking resources while shaping academic priorities during the annual budget review. In Figure 2, I attempt to capture this interplay among the sensemaking resources, drawing from an enactment-

selection-retention model that applies Weick's sensemaking resources, and sensegiving activities gleaned from the literature.

Under Selection, deans would be interpreting and grappling with a complex set of stimuli that comprise their college's and university's social context during an annual budget review. This social context features not only local conditions in the college such as the college's fiscal health and existing academic priorities and reputation, but also institutional considerations such as the university's fiscal health, fiscal policies such as cost containment and strategic priorities of the president or the provost as well as the mechanics of the university's budget model, the state of broader initiatives such as capital campaigns and strategic assessments and the preferences of trustees. In addition, this calculus would be affected by broader economic and political considerations such as decreasing state appropriations (for public universities) or decreasing federal expenditures for university research and development.

Under Retention, deans would begin to develop provisional interpretations of situations. In part, this iterative editing process would draw on the professional identities of deans as administrators and faculty. The literature on academic deans, for example, suggests that disciplinary background might affect the leadership and management styles of deans (Del Favero, 2005, 2006a). It might also activate dimensions of their personal identities beyond academe. In addition, this process would leverage a dean's perception of their work experience as administrations (*e.g.*, associate dean, department chair) and as scholars and instructors. The pull of biography might also include leadership experiences outside of work.

Figure 2: Modeling the Sensemaking and Sensegiving of Academic Deans during the Annual Budget Review



Under Enactment, deans would be engaging behaviors that refine and preserve emergent notions of academic priorities. On one hand, these behaviors might be solitary such as drafting and editing their own interpretations of academic priorities for the college in budget documents for the provost's office and reviewing and commenting on portions of budget documents that were drafted by colleagues such as associate deans and administrative directors. On the other hand, the behaviors of enactment might be social. Along with colleagues in the college such as members of the senior team, deans might discuss and debate drafts of budget documents for the provost's office, which would enable deans to test, question, clarify and affirm their emerging interpretations of academic priorities. In addition, deans might discuss budget documents with faculty in the college to propose academic priorities, seek their feedback on potential priorities and capture their impressions of the college's priorities.

My theoretical model reveals several important relationships between sensemaking and sensegiving. First, by coupling sensegiving with the profiled enactment-selection-retention model of sensemaking, it suggests a dynamic interaction between the sensemaking and sensegiving of deans. A dean's sensegiving amplifies the effects of the answer to the question of how do I know what I think until I hear what I say it? This interaction between a dean's sensemaking and sensegiving begs an underexplored question: just how discrete are sensemaking and sensegiving activities for senior managers? During the annual budget review, sensemaking and sensegiving might constitute reciprocal processes whereby deans, along with members of their senior team such as associate deans and senior administrators such as the provost, develop, question and affirm the meaning of academic priorities in their colleges and across the institution.



The experience of a dean convening their senior team to draft budget documents during the annual budget review offers an example. To begin this meeting, a dean might detail their interpretations of the provost's expectations and perceptions among faculty concerning academic priorities as well as define parameters for exploring and articulating academic priorities within financial constraints, reference data and documents from previous strategic planning or budget reports or presentations and recall past experiences navigating the budget review. These activities could be categorized as "enactment" for sensemaking and "performing the conversation" for sensegiving. The attendees of this meeting – associate deans, assistant deans, finance directors, administrative directors, department chairs – probably expect the dean to not only articulate their assessment of these considerations, but also to impose some sort of structure on the discussion and exploration. A dean derives the content of their actions from the enactment of sensemaking, but personifies this content through sensegiving, which signals an explicit exchange between sensegiving and selection during sensemaking.

Second, the model also illustrates that the sensegiving of other stakeholders shapes the sensemaking and sensegiving of deans. Take the meeting example above: during discussion, deans begin to shape or enact their environment by proclaiming, questioning and affirming the college's academic priorities, but the reactions of colleagues during the meeting will inform iterative conceptions and articulations of these academic priorities. An associate dean, for example, might question the extent to which the faculty agrees with a decision to expand a program before hiring new faculty in a different department; or an administrative director might explain how other colleges across campus are approaching common problems such as increasing diversity. These

new inputs will likely recast the dean's characterization of the social context, salient cues and notions of plausibility. This illustration reinforces Tierney's (1989) characterization of deans interpreting across constituencies and Dill's reflection that deans "pull together a sense" of purpose, specification, and contribution within their colleges.

This observation illustrates that the richness of a dean's sensemaking, and by extension sensegiving, depends on the extent to which deans are willing to enact some set actions. In meetings of the senior team, or meeting with the faculty, proclaiming something, questioning something or proposing something. Deans who bunker themselves in the dean's suite or fail to create or leverage forums for discussing and evaluating academic priorities with a diverse set of stakeholders not only circumscribe their own sensemaking capacity, but also risk generating sensemaking gaps that inhibit their ability to articulate and convey their preferred interpretation of academic priorities. This missed opportunity might encourage other individuals such as associate deans or department chairs in the college, or even the provost, to articulate an alternative set of academic priorities for the college. This observation extends a finding from Kezar and Eckel's (2002a) examination of organizational change in higher education: administrators should create forums for sensemaking to occur – not only for faculty and staff, but also for themselves.

## CHAPTER III

### Research Methods

#### Research Paradigm: “Direct Interpretive”

My dissertation is grounded in the interpretive research paradigm. Kuhn (1962) focused attention on the relationship between different methods of research (and theorizing) and the taken-for-granted perspectives of researchers. Paradigms represent “very basic meta-theoretical assumptions which underwrite the frame of reference, mode of theorizing and *modus operandi* of the social theorists who operate within them” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 23). Morgan (1979) identifies three central properties of paradigms: 1) a complete “way of seeing;” 2) a school of thought situated within “the social organization of science;” and 3) an espoused technology for “scientific puzzle solving” (p. 606). Different paradigms tend to reflect different orientations to ontology, epistemology and methodology. Gioia has argued that paradigms are not mutually exclusive; accepting one paradigm does not preclude acknowledging or even espousing the assumptions of other paradigms (Gioia & Pitre, 1980; Weaver & Gioia, 1984).

The debate over paradigms in both higher education and organizational research typically contrasts functionalist and interpretive perspectives. The functionalist paradigm assumes that society exists in a concrete, tangible sense; it “has a systematic character oriented to produce an ordered and regulated state of affairs” (Morgan, 1980, p. 608).

With this paradigm, the “truth” can be identified, measured and tested by employing “objective” and “value-free” scientific methods; the researcher represents a “disinterested scientist” preoccupied with ensuring internal and external validity and reliability (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morgan, 1980). The majority of journal articles in higher education research have been found to espouse the functionalist paradigm (Milam, 1991).

In contrast, the interpretive paradigm assumes a more ambiguous depiction of the world. An interpretivist believes that “what passes as social reality does not exist in any concrete sense, but is the product of the subjective and inter-subjective experience of individuals” (Morgan, 1980, p. 608). This frame of reference reveals an important difference between the functionalist and interpretive paradigms: it focuses on the subject’s rather than the researcher’s understanding of social reality. Research espousing the interpretive paradigm presents “the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and concretely *about* them [research subjects], but what is more important, creatively and imaginatively *with* them” (Geertz, 1973, p. 23). The interpretive researcher strives to understand and explain how multiple social realities emerge, coexist and evolve within a frame of reference. Questions concerning the “truth” of social constructions are supplanted by the authenticity of constructions. Accounts aim to “distill a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111).

These differences between the functionalist and interpretive paradigms present clear implications for research design. A functionalist might conceive of theory building as testing and validating relationships between variables whereas an interpretivist likely

envisions contribution in terms of suggesting new connections among variables (Astley, 1985; Weick, 1989). The quality of theory building for an interpretivist resembles Weick's (1989) notion of the "centrality of plausibility." "A theory is judged to be more plausible and of higher quality if it is interesting rather than obvious, irrelevant or absurd, obvious in novel ways, a source of unexpected connections, high in narrative rationality, aesthetically pleasing, or correspondent with presumed realities" (p. 517). The researcher focuses on identifying unexplored relationships more than discovering the "correct" version of events.

This consideration of paradigms informs the research perspective shaping my dissertation. I characterize the paradigm guiding my research as direct interpretive. First, it subscribes to the inter-subjective focus of the interpretive paradigm: my objective is to understand how the experiences and interactions of academic deans affect how they make sense of academic priorities during the annual budget review. Second, I interviewed and observed my sample of participants not just for the sake of scientific validity (discussed further below), but also for capturing a rich snapshot of the social realities shaping the sensemaking of deans. In the words of Van Maanen, Sorenson and Mitchell (2007), I strove to stimulate a "process of discovery rather than only a logic of validation" (p. 1146). Third, despite deriving motivation from the functionalist emphasis on rigorous research, I question the extent to which an ordered social reality exists "out there," if I just investigate long enough. This distinction helps to describe my direct interpretive framework, which I explore in the following subsections.

## Research Design

### *Case Study Method*

My investigation of academic deans applies the case study method. Case studies present rich empirical descriptions of a phenomenon within a specific setting (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994). In contrast to laboratory experiments, or even quantitative investigations in the social sciences, which aim to isolate phenomena from their environment, case studies embrace the “rich, real-world context” shaping the phenomena in question. For this reason, case studies help to stimulate theory because it “answers research questions that address ‘how’ and ‘why’ in unexplored research areas” (Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007, p. 25, 27). I collected data using qualitative methods that are often applied in case study research: conducting semi-structured interviews with deans and other administrators; 2) completing observations of administrative meetings, including smaller meetings between deans and key stakeholders; and 3) analyzing documents (Merriam, 1998). (I explore my data collection in detail later in this chapter).

Theoretical sampling informed my selection of field site. The case study method implies a sampling method that prioritizes illumination of theory over representativeness of a population (Eisenhardt, 1989; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). My sample, therefore, aimed to explore promising conditions for studying the phenomena in question: how deans shape and make sense of academic priorities during an annual budget review. I wanted to select a university that afforded significant authority to its deans for academic and financial affairs. At first, I considered studying multiple institutions, but decided to conduct an investigation of deans at a single university. After researching several public universities as potential field sites, including reading university documents and

corresponding with senior administrators, I decided to study one public research university, which I am calling Sprawling University. This institution implemented a decentralized budget model more than a decade ago, which affords deans significant authority over academic and financial affairs in their colleges. During informational interviews with current and former deans and administrators in the provost's office, respondents characterized deans as the chief academic and budget officers of their colleges. The nature of the university's budget model, coupled with the uncertain economic and political environment confronting the institution, reflects the sort of dynamic organizational context that stimulates sensemaking and sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). In the next chapter, I profile Sprawling University in more detail.

My actual data collection deviated from my proposed plan. Most importantly, approval from institutional review board required more time than expected due to the sensitivity of analyzing the financial data and strategic priorities of a public university. My dissertation proposal called for recruitment to begin in November 2011 and data collection to begin in January 2012, which would have allowed for data analysis to begin in summer 2012. To recruit participants, I first sent a formal letter inviting deans to participate in the study (which is featured in Appendix D). This letter not only described the purpose of the study, but also detailed desired research access (per the specifications of IRB approval). If I received no response, I contacted the dean via email, copying their administrative assistant, which was public information available on the university's web site. Due to the time required to secure IRB approval, I sent recruitment letters in January 2012 rather than November 2011, which coincided with the beginning of the annual budget review at the institution.

My initial experience with recruitment was unsuccessful. Of the eleven deans I initially contacted about the study,<sup>1</sup> I received three invitations to discuss the research in greater detail and three email messages declining participation; five deans did not respond in any form. This initial reaction was disheartening, but the experience ultimately revealed valuable lessons for my eventual data collection. First, I learned that some deans considered my proposed research as either too sensitive or too intensive. With respect to sensitivity, one dean did not “feel comfortable” opening up the college’s budget “black box” to an outsider. For this dean, it was difficult to invite an outsider to observe discussions about resource allocation that often excluded the college’s own faculty, administrators and staff. With respect to intensity, one dean declined to participate because of her travel schedule over the upcoming year while another dean declined to participate because coordinating my attendance in meetings would have been too cumbersome (though she appreciated why I wanted this research access). Second, even the deans who declined participation voiced enthusiasm for the project. They, too, agreed that their work deserved more scholarly attention.

With this experience, I postponed further recruitment until summer 2012. In August 2012, I contacted the deans in my initial sample, except for the two deans who had declined participation due to the sensitivity and intensity of the research. I also invited a different dean to participate. This round of recruitment proved far more successful, attracting the participation of seven deans, though some deans agreed to participate on the condition that I could not attend meetings of their senior teams.

Interestingly, I received quick, affirmative responses to participate from four deans who

---

<sup>1</sup> I did not invite three other deans to participate because their colleges offered only small, targeted graduate programs, which were unlike the other colleges at the institution.



had not responded to my initial request eight months earlier. I attribute these different outcomes to three factors: deans were more likely to read my letter (or email), and consider the benefits of the research, in August than in January; I further underscored the sensitivity of the research in my second recruitment letter, emphasizing the extent to which data would remain anonymous; and I had underestimated the extent to which deans had already prepared budget documents when I originally sent recruitment letters.

For each participant, I pledged to provide as much anonymity and confidentiality as possible. This pledge informed my approach to writing in six important ways. First, I created pseudonyms for the six profiled deans, assigning each of them a name of a famous novelist. Second, I do not identify the colleges of the deans, choosing only to identify each of their colleges as the “college.” Third, I use generic positional labels to refer to other respondents, including finance director, associate dean, assistant dean, administrative director and senior central administrator. Fourth, I do not reference specific figures that could reveal the actual identity of Sprawling University or any of the colleges. Fifth, I tried to only identify the sex of deans, which was informed by writing style as much as conceptual considerations. Sixth, I sanitized specific college-specific references that could have revealed the identity of deans and their colleges. Senior teams in colleges, for example, were called various specific names, but I only refer to these teams as the “senior team” in my findings.

### *Interviews*

My research depended on interviews. I conducted interviews with three primary groups: 1) academic deans; 2) administrators in the colleges of the profiled deans, including associate deans, assistant deans, administrative directors (*e.g.*, director of

student affairs) and finance directors; and 3) central administrators in the provost's office. I conducted 63 research interviews at Sprawling University between September 2012 and July 2015. I conducted 21 interviews with the six profiled academic deans. In addition, I conducted five additional interviews with three other deans. I also conducted 33 interviews with finance directors, associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors in the colleges of the six profiled deans. I also conducted four interviews with four different central administrators, including a senior central administrator and a former senior central administrator. In Table 1, I have summarized background information on each of the six profiled deans, including their pseudonym, sex and disciplinary background as well as the size of their college's budget. In Table 2, I summarize three key aspects of data collection – the number of interviews with each dean, the number of interviews with members of senior teams in each college and the number of observations in each college. Table 1 and Table 2 are presented on the next page.

Interviews were semi-structured. I followed an interview protocol, but also asked spontaneous follow-up questions that stimulated deeper descriptions (Hammer & Wildavsky, 1993; Merriam, 1998; Weiss, 1994). My interview approach aimed to create a "space" in which deans and others felt comfortable "telling stories" (Crandall, Klein, & Hoffman, 2006) and revealing their "essence or inner core – the stuff that makes them tick" (Hermanowicz, 2002, p. 481). The interviews explored the proposed research questions to understand how the theorized mechanisms of sensemaking – for example, social context, identity, past experience (retrospect) – shape how deans and other respondents made sense and shaped academic priorities during the annual budget review.

Table 1

*Biographical Backgrounds of the Profiled Deans*

<u>Dean</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Disciplinary Background</u>	<u>Salient Experience</u>	<u>College Budget Size</u>
Dean Austen	F	Soft/Applied	Dean, peer university; Associate Dean, peer university	> \$50M
Dean Conrad	M	Hard/Applied	Dean, peer university; Department Chair, SU	\$25M – \$50M
Dean Huxley	M	Soft/Pure	Dean, several peer universities	< \$25M
Dean Joyce	M	Soft/Applied	Associate Dean, SU	< \$25M
Dean Stowe	F	Soft/Pure	Research Director, peer university	< \$25 M
Dean Swift	M	Hard/Applied	Department Chair, SU	> \$50M

Table 2

*Summary of Data Collection with Profiled Deans*

<u>Dean</u>	<u>Interviews</u>	<u>Interviews with Members of Senior Team</u>	<u>Observations of Team Meetings</u>
Dean Austen	3	4	0
Dean Conrad	4	5	4
Dean Huxley	5	3	0
Dean Joyce	3	6	12
Dean Stowe	4	5	0
Dean Swift	2	9	4

Research on sensemaking and sensegiving underscores the necessity of engaging a diverse set of participants inside organizations; Maitlis and Lawrence (2007), for example, conducted 120 interviews in their investigation of sensemaking and sensegiving at three British symphony orchestras. To generate a portrait of a dean's sensemaking, I not only needed to interview and observe deans, but also interview and observe other individuals who influence and are the audience for the dean's sensegiving.

Interviews were conducted in person before, during and after the university's annual budget review. With the consent of participants – I asked participants to sign an informed consent form before beginning each interview – I audio-taped interviews to help document their salient experiences and generate a verbatim transcript. In preparation for each interview, I reviewed each participant's c.v. (as available) to familiarize myself with their academic and professional background. Every interview was transcribed; a professional typist transcribed many of the interviews, but I reviewed each transcription for accuracy and to increase my familiarity with the data. I elected to transcribe some of the interviews that featured harsh critiques of the profiled deans because I simply felt uncomfortable sharing this sensitive content with a transcriber. My review of these transcripts also informed follow-up questions for subsequent interviews with the profiled deans. A complement to my interviews was journaling, which was completed after some interviews and observations to record my initial reactions (Hammer & Wildavsky, 1993).

The interpretive orientation of my research informs several important implications for analyzing interviews. I did not perform member checks; I did not want to create opportunities for participants to manage or manipulate their impressions of important experiences. The use of member checking could obscure descriptions of sensemaking;

“mistakes” might not reflect errors as much as the traces of how the sensemaking of participants had evolved between completing the interview and reading the transcript. This said, when I conducted follow-up interviews with the profiled deans, and asked questions that were informed by our earlier interviews, I did not encounter instances of deans trying to alter or qualify their earlier responses. Importantly, I offered participants access to interview transcripts upon request, but I did not receive any requests.

During interviews, I encountered two specific surprises. First, I was not expecting the degree of candor offered by many of the respondents – deans, associate deans, finance directors, administrative directors and even administrators in the provost’s office. In particular, I was surprised that associate deans and finance directors in some colleges and some administrators in the provost’s office were willing to articulate harsher judgments of deans and provosts. As a researcher, I was eager to capture rich portraits of how deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review – the good, the bad and the ugly – but I also aimed to maintain a sense of detachment while hearing brutal assessments of deans and provosts because I did not want my immediate reaction to distort the interviews. Moreover, I did not sense that negative characterizations were motivated by bitterness. Instead critical assessments mostly demonstrated a sincere concern for the fate of their college and the university.

Second, I was surprised during interviews by the extent to which two of the deans, Dean Conrad and Dean Stowe, did not engage members of their senior teams during the annual budget review. (Note: I explore their approaches to engaging their senior teams during the annual budget review in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7). After interviews with these two deans, I expected some version of this narrative to emerge from interviews with

associate deans and administrative directors in these two colleges. In conducting observations of the senior team in Dean Conrad's college, for example, I noted that Dean Conrad never mentioned the annual budget review or the annual budget memo. In our second interview, Dean Conrad minimized the extent to which he engaged members of the senior team during the annual review. I did not anticipate that deans would exclude most members of their senior teams from the annual budget review because former deans had stressed the importance of consultation across colleges (Morris, 1981), especially with their senior administrative teams (Krahenbuhl, 2004).

My interviews with associate deans who were excluded from authorship of the annual budget memo presented some tricky moments. On one hand, I had to maintain my poise as a researcher, trying not to interject too much of my own surprise into the social interaction. Yet I also sensed a need to acknowledge some form of surprise to create a social space in which these individuals felt comfortable describing their own confusion and frustration. Not surprisingly, these interviews proved to be among the most emotional interactions of the project.

### *Observations*

Observations provided essential data. I completed 21 observations of four profiled deans, including 18 meetings of senior teams in three colleges. I also completed two observations of public meetings on campus that discussed budget issues, including the meeting in which the Board of Trustees approved the budget proposed by the provost. Some observational methods espouse intensive immersion in a setting, including the “complete participant” and “participant as observer” categories from Gold’s (1958) typology of naturalistic roles or the “complete-member-researcher” and “active-member-

researcher” roles from Adler and Adler’s (1987) typology. My approach, however, applied Gold’s (1958) “observer as participant” and Adler and Adler’s (1987) “peripheral-member-researcher” roles. Instead of participating in the research setting – talking during meetings, for example – I observed “closely enough” to establish an “insider’s identity,” but without assuming work responsibilities (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 380). My research aimed to apply more intensive ethnographic methods. Bate (1997), for example, explained, “On closer examination ‘thick description’ invariably turns out to be ‘quick description’ ... A journey into the organizational bush is often little more than a safe and closely chaperoned form of anthropological tourism” (p. 1150).

My research benefited immensely from observations. First, I collected essential data on how some of the profiled deans shaped and made sense of academic priorities during the annual budget review from observations. In this respect, I wish I could have collected observational data on more of the profiled deans. In reflecting on his fieldwork, Van Maanen (1979) deems observational methods as necessary to “uncover” and “explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation” (p. 540).

Second, observations helped to triangulate my findings. In some instances, observational data animated a theme that was mentioned during an interview or referenced in a document. In other instances, observational data stimulated a theme to explore in a follow-up interview, review in a document or glean from a subsequent observation.

Third, observations offered a vivid depiction of the social context across the university and in each college. Along with descriptions from interviews, these rich portraits revealed the social context shaping the nature of sensemaking of deans and other

administrators. Observations not only clarified findings – individuals do not always do what they say they do, or as Weick (1995) reminds us, “observations of actions are crucial to offset the possibility what people tell us about their theories of sensemaking has limited relevance to how they function” – but also helped to refine subsequent interviews by providing richer description of the social context and offering an opportunity to investigate the meaning of observed behavior. In these ways, observations offered a unique opportunity to investigate sensemaking happening in “real time.”

My observations targeted settings in which deans explored academic priorities such as college-level senior leadership team meetings and college-level financial team meetings. It was common for deans and other administrators in colleges to use these meetings to discuss the annual budget memorandum for provost’s office. My research would have benefited from attending meetings between the dean and senior administrators such as the provost, but I surmised that these discussions were confidential and impossible to observe within the scope of this research project. That said, I did ask deans whether I could attend their budget conferences with the provost; and these inquiries rarely generated any response from deans.

During observations, I tried to focus on several specific behaviors. First, I focused on how deans participated in discussion – introducing issues or problems, asking questions of their senior teams, offering their opinion, responding to other contributions, remaining silent. With this focus, I tried to capture as many quotes as possible, though this pressure proved less burdensome as most teams allowed me to audio-tape their discussions. Second, I focused on interactions among participants, particularly the behavior of deans. I noted the sequencing of who spoke; how often individuals spoke;



and how for how long. I also observed more subtle actions such as nonverbal reactions and attendance at meetings and individuals who were absent from certain meetings. Third, I focused on the physical setting such as the location of a meeting and seating arrangements during meetings. Unlike with my interviews, I transcribed all audio-taped records of my observations due to the sensitivity of the information discussed in meetings and my familiarity with each person's voice.

Despite the explanatory power of observations, I appreciate that this method has its limitations. My research envisions sensemaking as a continual evolution shaped by numerous individuals. Observations, which are bounded to a discrete time, place and group of individuals, might capture only some of the dynamism of sensemaking. "Events" do not always "happen" when and where a researcher is present; events are often retrospective constructions that are deemed consequential. Despite my sensitivity to this research reality, I was fortunate to observe meetings of deans discussing academic priorities over a span of consecutive weeks and even months in several instances.

I also asked deans about "shadowing" them as a complementary method to the observation of meetings (Czarniawska, 2004; Mintzberg, 1973, 1979). As Czarniawska explains, shadowing helps reveal "modern organizing" because it "takes place in a net of fragmented, multiple contexts, through multitudes of kaleidoscopic movements" (p. 786). Unfortunately, extensive shadowing of deans proved impossible due to their schedules and the sensitivity of their work. My initial negotiations with deans quickly revealed that there were far more conversations I could not attend than those I could attend due to confidentiality. With this ambition in mind, however, I tried to meet with deans before

and after meetings with their senior teams, affording some opportunity to observe deans in more informal, unstructured settings with their colleagues in the college.

### *Documents*

University documents was another important source of data for my research. An essential set of documents was university financial records, including annual financial reports; public universities are required to publish these records. In addition, at Sprawling University, each dean submits an annual budget memorandum to the provost's office as part of the annual budget review. This document, which is described in detail in Chapter 6, offers a rich financial and strategic snapshot of each college, including the college's key goals, its progress against goals from the previous year, projections for enrollment and faculty hiring and projections for reallocated expenditures. I requested and received copies of the budget memo for each of the six profiled deans. I did not analyze these documents in great detail – due to confidentiality concerns, I could not expose data such as specific academic priorities or specific financial data – but I noted patterns across the colleges. The budget memos, for example, emphasized many common priorities such as stimulating faculty research and increasing scholarship support for students. In several cases, the strategic plans or external assessments of colleges also offered rich background information, including financial history and programmatic initiatives.

### **Data Analysis**

The interpretative nature of my dissertation influenced my approach to data analysis. My analysis consisted of the systematic coding of interview and observation transcripts, which reflected the methodological norms of qualitative inquiry (Strauss &

Corbin, 1998). Within the spirit of grounded theory, I tried to maintain an “open attitude” to the range of potential meanings from the data, thus resisting the urge to create quick assumptions about the data or force observations into existing vocabularies (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). Mintzberg (1979) warned, “As soon as the researcher insists on forcing the organization into abstract categories – into his terms instead of its own – he is reduced to using perceptual measures, which often distort reality” (p. 586).

My coding strategy featured five phases. First, I read each transcript. This reading not only reoriented myself to the interaction, deepening my knowledge of the data, but also provided an opportunity to relive interactions in hopes of improving my own practice as an interviewer. This practice, for example, underscored the importance of creating an open, safe space during interviews. The less I interjected while respondents answered questions, the more they tended to offer their perspectives in colorful detail. Second, I compared the verbatim transcript to my hand-written notes from interviews and journaling after interviews. While this comparison rarely revealed variation – the transcript often reflected what I thought had been discussed – it did sensitize me to differences in tone of during interviews and refined my notetaking during interviews and observations. This practice also trained my ear; I found myself hearing eventual quotes during subsequent interviews, which improved my note taking during interviews.

Third, I analyzed my transcripts to create raw units of data that described the behavior and perspectives of respondents. This phase resembled open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This phase of coding began to reveal key themes that would eventually serve as the foundation for my findings chapters. During this phase, for example, I began to realize that deans who distributed authorship of the annual

budget memorandum demonstrated some sensitivity to sensemaking and sensegiving whereas those who dominated or delegated authorship did not consider sensemaking and sensegiving important considerations during the annual budget review. Moreover, this phase of analysis was exciting as a researcher. At this stage, I began to fully realize that respondents were providing data that could be translated into publications. I also began to appreciate the candor of respondents; they often demonstrated greater candor than I had expected to hear, including some of the profiled deans articulating critical judgments of provosts and administrators in the provost's office and some college administrators critiquing their deans and administrators in the provost's office.

Fourth, I calibrated many descriptors from my open coding. I wanted to ascribe consistent labels to similar phenomenon that was emerging from interviews within and across colleges. This process helped to organize concepts into potential chapters for my findings. Fifth, and relatedly, I began abstracting behaviors to translate fragments of data into emergent concepts. This phase of coding resembled axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). This step included translating emergent open codes into concepts such as the properties of sensemaking that were affecting the ways in deans shaped academic priorities. This phase helped to crystal the more abstracted concepts that were emerging from data analysis such as the role of identity in affecting how deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities, which is featured in Chapter 5, and the ways in which deans stimulate open dialogue on their senior teams, which is featured in Chapter 8.

This explanation, albeit accurate, only summarizes my approach to data analysis. During data analysis, I also encountered several notable challenges, and even frustrations, while trying to make sense of my data from interviews and observations. First, I had to

determine a structure for presenting my findings that both exhibited the vivid data collected on each dean and translated this data into an integrated set of insights. At first, I considered presenting my findings as a chapter on each dean; in fact, I began writing my findings in this fashion. Ultimately, I rejected this approach because a chapter on each dean not only began to feel mammoth, but also became too disconnected from integral findings about the sensemaking of deans such as the relationship between deans and the provost, the relationship between deans and their senior teams and decentralized budget models. In response, I decided to reorganize my draft narratives on each dean into the five findings chapters that are now featured in my dissertation.

Second, I had to determine how to integrate my rich, extensive interview data with my rich, but patchy observational data. While I conducted extensive interviews with all of the deans, I conducted observations of senior teams of only three of the six profiled deans. I observed Dean Conrad, Dean Joyce and Dean Swift in action, but was unable to observe Dean Austen, Dean Huxley and Dean Stowe with their senior teams during the annual budget review. With Dean Joyce and Dean Swift, I collected observational data that illustrated why and how they engaged their senior teams in collective sensemaking and interview data from these deans and members of their senior teams that echoed these insights. I collected interview data that offered similar insights from Dean Austen and Dean Huxley as well as from members of their senior teams, but I did not have observational data to validate or qualify these insights. This difference presented challenges while outlining several findings chapters, especially Chapter 7, which explores the extent to which the profiled academic deans leverage authorship of the annual budget memo to establish a collective sense of academic priorities among their senior teams.

Ultimately, I realized that I needed to focus on the data I had rather than the data I did not have. My incomplete observational data provided richer insights as compared to not having any observational data at all.

Third, I had to determine how to present two different approaches to engaging individuals within their colleges during the annual budget reviews – the inclusive approach of distributing authorship and exclusive approaches of dominating and delegating authorship. (In Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, I explore these findings in detail). On one hand, four deans (those who distributed authorship of the annual budget memo) wanted to establish some shared sense of priorities among their senior teams during the annual budget review. On the other hand, two deans (those who dominated and delegated authorship) did not aim to establish a shared sense of academic priorities with their senior teams. In particular, this variation in approach complicated my conceptualization and organization of Chapter 7. Ultimately, I decided to present the four deans who established some shared sense of priorities before the other two deans who did not. In Chapter 8, I only focused on the deans who articulated an emphasis on establishing some shared sense of priorities, which corresponded to their approach to distributing authorship of the annual budget memo and more broadly shaping academic priorities.

In contrast, I expected to encounter challenges with analyzing observational data that did not come to fruition. One common challenge in analyzing observational data is distinguishing between what Van Maanen (1979) called “presentational data” and “operational data” (542). Operational data represents the “running stream of spontaneous conversations and activities” observed by researchers in the field (Van Maanen, 1979: 542); Mintzberg (1973) calls this type of data “anecdotal” (232). Presentational data,

however, can prove more difficult to analyze because it is often “ideological, normative, and abstract” and concerns “the appearances put forth by informants as these activities are talked about and otherwise symbolically projected within the research setting” (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 542). The analytical distinction between these two types of data might be best characterized as a sensitivity that reveals differences between organizational “fact” and “fiction.” Ultimately, I noted few instances of presentational data from my observations of meetings with deans and their senior team meetings. Yet with this challenge in mind, I tried to focus on not only the content of conversations, but also subtler verbal and non-verbal forms of behavior.

My approach to data analysis deviates from common misperceptions of grounded theory in two respects. First, I did not initiate this investigation with a “blank slate.” Suddaby (2006) captures my rationale for rejecting an unstructured approach, asserting, “Leaving aside the question of whether it is even *possible* to disregard one’s prior knowledge and experience, the idea that reasonable research can be conducted without a clear research question and absent theory simply defies logic” (p. 634). My approach aims to reflect Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) original articulation of the differences between “substantive knowledge,” or extant theory in a specific subject, shaping the “formulation and generation” of grounded theory (p. 79). Their original sensitivity to the influence of previous knowledge stems not from “contaminating” the researcher’s perspective, but instead dissuading the researcher from testing existing knowledge at the expense of minimizing their findings and identifying new relationships (Suddaby, 2006, p. 635).

Second, the outlined coding strategy reflects an interest in systematic rigor more than dutifully applying a mechanical analytical method. Interpretive research demands

what Glaser (1978) called “theoretical sensitivity” – a “fascinating interplay of researcher and data in which understanding of what is being described in the data slowly evolves until the researcher says ‘Aha that is what they are telling me’” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 33). For this reason, I chose not to “delegate” the process of interpretation to research technology whether it is a prescribed coding process or qualitative content software (Suddaby, 2006). To best stimulate creativity during the coding process, I coded my transcripts in Microsoft (MS) Word. I even sometimes first read paper copies of transcripts, initially writing comments in the margins. After reflecting on my own habits of mind, I believed reading and marking copies in MS Word generated rich engagement with my data during analysis.

### **Acknowledging Validity, Establishing Authenticity**

Despite my confidence in these research methods, I am sensitive to concerns of validity. In essence, how can I trust my eventual findings and conclusions “to be those things that it is intended to be an account of?” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 281). A discussion of validity returns to where I began this chapter: research paradigms. A functionalist, positivist perspective likely espouses that an objective “truth” can be identified from research; and the potential to replicate findings and the existence of codified statistical indicators reflect – maybe even prove – this integrity or validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

These benchmarks, however, prove less appropriate in interpretive research because the aim is not to establish replicable “laws.” Instead it is to construct rich accounts of subjective experiences. After conducting more than 60 research interviews, I



even question the extent to which I can establish the definitive “truth” about academic deans. Yet I draw inspiration from the *idea* of the truth; just as the sensemaking resource of plausibility motivates individuals to tease out “the right” story (even if it’s unattainable), I treat the concept of validity as a “regulative ideal” that motivates my pursuit of accuracy, authenticity and credibility (Phillips, 1987, p. 23). With this ambition, I tried to create greater understanding about the deanship, resembling what Geertz (1973) referred to as “to figure out what the native says and does, what the devil he thinks he’s up to” (p. 30). Van Maanen (1988) reminds us that the interpretive researcher’s intention “is not to tell readers what to think of an experience but to show them the experience from beginning to end and thus draw them immediately into the story to work out its problems and puzzles as they unfold” (p. 103).

My sensitivity to validity, therefore, disciplines the process of creating authentic research. My research plan demonstrated this emphasis: observing numerous participants in a diversity of settings numerous times; triangulating multiple data sources; recording interviews and observations as accurately and descriptively as possible (aided by an audio-recorder); and journaling notes of interviews or observations immediately after completing them (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Wolcott, 1990). This focus did not end with data collection, but extended to my data analysis and writing process. While writing my manuscript, for example, I tried to avoid judgmental diction (*e.g.*, writing “only one dean” versus “one dean”) and maximize the use of primary data (Adler & Adler, 1994; Fine, 2003; Wolcott, 1990). Wolcott (1990) characterized this type of attention to validity as “a constellation of activities intended not only to help *me* get things right (or keep me

from getting them all wrong) but to convey ideas in such a way that the *reader*, who is also not quite getting it right, is not getting it all wrong, either” (p. 133).

In summary, my general research approach can be characterized as “direct research” (Mintzberg, 1979). First, the data analysis remained as descriptive, and within the language of the participants, as possible. The research methods were as direct as possible: asking participants about experiences and events within their college and observing them during those experiences and events. Stephen Barley (2006) describes this approach as “methods that get close enough to behavior to show how people wittingly or unwittingly build and maintain their social worlds” (p. 17). In addition, my research methods generate data rich enough to suggest plausible “causal conjectures” (Mintzberg, 1979, 2003; Van Maanen, Sorenson & Mitchell, 2007, p. 1149). Fourth, the research was inductive, combining “detective work” with creativity. Mintzberg (1979) reminded us, “Peripheral vision, poking around in relevant places, a good dose of creativity – that is what makes good research, and always has, in all fields” (p. 585)

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Institutional Profile – Sprawling University**

#### **Introduction**

Due to concerns over confidentiality, I cannot profile Sprawling University in specific terms. The essence of the institution, however, does not require knowing its exact student enrollment, operating revenues or organizational structure. Faculty, students, alumni and administrators take pride in its reputation as a prominent public university. Its faculty includes recipients of national and international awards. Its undergraduate students choose from hundreds of majors and live in large residential complexes on campus and apartment buildings off campus. Its undergraduate alumni attend prominent graduate programs and work for organizations around the world. Its graduate alumni often become faculty at other universities.

#### **Overview of Governance Structure**

In some respects, the governance structure of Sprawling University resembles that of many public universities. A Board of Trustees governs the university. The state's constitution assigns the Board of Trustees responsibility for general oversight of the university, including oversight of the university's finances. The president, who serves as an ex officio member of the board, assumes numerous duties, including providing general

oversight of research and teaching, securing the university's financial welfare and fostering a healthy environment for students. The provost, who performs their duties in consultation with the president, serves as the chief academic and budget officer of the university. The dean of each college reports to the provost, not the president.

In other respects, Sprawling's governance structure differs from other public universities. Unlike other public universities, the institution retains significant autonomy under the state's constitution. One state official contrasts Sprawling's autonomy with the restrictions imposed on other public universities across the country. Most public institutions are governed by "a large expensive bureaucracy at the state level," but Sprawling is mostly "free from state governance." A university administrator explains that drafters of the state's constitution aimed "to minimize the intrusion" of "politics" and governmental "interference" on the institution. The university, for example, does not report to a state board of education or a state coordinating board. Moreover, the university directly receives its state appropriation. Historically, the governor and state legislature have not meddled with university policies such as setting tuition and fees, though the legislature and governor have begun to link increases in appropriations to certain performance indicators.

### **The "Campus Budget" Model**

Many respondents underscored the decentralized character of Sprawling University, which partly stems from the decentralization of budget authority across the institution. Some explanation of the university's budget model helps to describe the institutional content in which academic deans shape priorities. The university has been

experimenting with incentive-based budgeting since the 1980s when the provost's office began offering incentives to colleges and non-academic divisions to better align costs and activities. During the 1990s, Sprawling implemented a new decentralized budget model that integrated many of these incentive-based elements with the university's legacy incremental budget model. The introduction of the new budget model, however, received mixed reviews across campus. On one hand, most academic and financial administrators preferred it to the incremental budget model. The new model offered more transparency; administrators could more clearly identify the revenues and costs of most activities. The model also shifted more budget authority from the provost's office to dean's offices across campus. The dean of each college now enjoyed significant budgetary autonomy from the provost's office, making the colleges more like "tubs on their own bottoms."

Despite these benefits, deans and senior central administrators also realized that the new model had its shortcomings. Colleges now received revenue allocations based on formulas for tuition and fees and indirect cost recovery from research and interest, while also being assessed cost allocations for financial aid, physical space, academic public goods such as libraries and administrative services. The increased decentralization might have stimulated the entrepreneurial spirit of some deans, but it also worried deans who presided over colleges with smaller enrollments and lower research activity. One concern was whether some colleges could survive on their own revenues, particularly revenues from tuition and indirect cost recovery. The new budget model reinforced the importance of prudent financial stewardship, but its "bottom line" mantra privileged colleges that could leverage economies of scale, enroll more students, charge higher tuition rates or pursue research and consulting services to generate new sources of revenue.

In response to these concerns, the provost at the time and other administrators in the provost's office revised the new budget model, introducing the Campus Budget. With the Campus Budget, all units are categorized as academic or service units. The academic units consist of the colleges, research centers and campus academic units. Colleges are the academic units that enroll students, offer courses, grant degrees, conduct research and perform public service. Research centers are independent units that conduct research and provide forums for research collaboration among faculty. Campus academic units consist mostly of libraries and museums. The service units represent a diverse set of non-academic units that are sustained by their own revenues, ranging from housing to public safety. My investigation only focuses on colleges.

Colleges mostly generate revenues from tuition and fees, recovery of indirect costs from sponsored research and modest amounts of interest from their balances. Colleges generate most of their revenues from tuition and fees. State residency does not affect a college's allocation of tuition revenue for undergraduate students, which eliminates any incentive to admit out-of-state students to collect higher tuition rates. For undergraduate students, some tuition rates differ by college. Students enrolled in the engineering college, for example, pay a higher rate than those enrolled in the liberal arts college, meaning that the average tuition attribution for a full-time student in engineering is more than the attribution for a full-time student in liberal arts. By contrast, tuition attribution for graduate students incorporates both differentials for rates and residency to reflect the real costs to units of enrolling graduate students, including offering grants to out-of-state students directly from the colleges' budgets.

The Campus Budget model features the Addendum, which is a supplement that provides some colleges additional revenues beyond their net revenues and costs. The Addendum, which was introduced with the Campus Budget, serves as acknowledgement that some colleges need additional resources from the provost's office to sustain their operations. The Addendum might be a positive figure for some colleges, totaling millions of dollars, while it might be a negative figure for other colleges. The provost's office contends that colleges assigned a negative figure possess more capacity to generate offsetting revenues from their activities than other colleges.

With the Campus Budget, the primary costs for colleges are faculty and staff salaries and benefits and financial aid. With respect to facilities, costs for space include utilities and plant operations such as maintenance, custodial services and refuse. Another cost for colleges, the "campus tax," is one of the more complicated and dynamic features of the Campus Budget. Without exposing its specific details, the provost's office "taxes" the expenditures of colleges. Administrators in the provost's office emphasize two dimensions of the tax system. First, the tax base increases at the same rate as expenditures across campus; a college only pays more taxes if it increases its expenditures. Second, tax revenues enable the provost's office to reallocate resources across academic (and non-academic) units to fund special initiatives that support the university's mission.

### **Authority with the Campus Budget**

The Campus Budget model situates significant budget authority with both the provost and the deans of colleges. On one hand, the provost serves as the university's

chief academic officer and chief budget officer. This integration of responsibilities aims to promote budget decisions that support broad academic priorities across the university. An administrator in the provost's office characterizes these dual responsibilities as a unique strength of the institution, explaining,

I think one of our other huge strengths is that unlike many institutions, the provost is supposed to be the chief budget officer and the chief academic officer. That linking goes together and allowing the provost to make decisions about resource allocations really improved the way that the institution functions and how it invest its resources.

In a public forum, another senior administrator echoes this perspective, arguing, "I think that's one of the strengths we have here because the combination ensures that academics get the highest priority when the budget is allocated."

The provost, therefore, retains significant authority over budgetary affairs at the university. The provost assumes responsibility for proposing a budget to the Board of Trustees. Administrators in the provost's office also manage important levers such as the Addendum and the tax system. The details of the tax system, for example, changed over the time of my study. As explained in one internal report, the Campus Budget enables "the provost to influence policy and priorities through the Addendum and allow for differentiation in financial support among colleges, as strategically appropriate." Similarly, a different internal report concludes that the budget model "is well designed for an active provost who is willing to reallocate resources towards the academic mission and among academic units." Moreover, these administrators serve as monitors of the university's general fund budget, overseeing how deans allocate their resources through the annual budget review and the accompanying annual budget memorandum and annual budget conference; I explain these milestones in Chapter 6.



The profiled academic deans underscore the central role of the provost across campus. Despite the university's decentralized culture, one dean argues that the provost assumes a "really important" role in pointing deans and their colleges in some common direction. "The provost really plays a role here to help guide the [college]. Doesn't tell the [college] what to do; helps guide them, helps them understand their position within the university and how they relate to other units." Moreover, this dean believes the provost assumes a "most important" role in guiding the financial direction of colleges. The provost has to understand "where the particular [college] is headed, getting a sense how are they managing the resources they have."

The profiled deans, along with finance directors from the colleges, mostly applaud the provost's leadership. In particular, some deans underscored the provost's commitment to fairness and transparency. Deans refer to the provost as "very upfront" and "incredibly fair." One dean, for example, credits the provost's reputation for fairness as helping the university through difficult financial times. "No special deals, no horsing around, and also fully transparent. You know what's going on so you don't have to worry that you don't understand why the decision was made, how the decision was made, or anything like that. No horsing around." The same dean respects the provost's candor with fiscal issues. "If [the provost] thought you were going off the rails, [the provost] is telling you ... Where if [the provost] thought, maybe in their finances ... that improvements were needed, and [the provost] had suggestions to make, [the provost] flat out told them."

The provost used forums such as monthly meetings of the Council of Deans to underscore these points. One dean recalled the provost using one of their meetings to explain a chronic, yet concealed problem across campus – the provost's office often

needs to offer new deans influxes of resources to correct deficits in their colleges. “[The provost] made a presentation showing that in certain units, every time a dean turns over, the campus has to pour a whole bunch of money in the unit to get the budget back up to zero, so that we can recruit that new dean.” Instead of avoiding this discussion, the provost detailed the detriments of this informal (and longstanding) policy to the deans. “We discussed all that, and [the provost] said this isn't happening anymore. You're actually going to be responsible for your deficits. The campus will help you get back up to zero, but once you're up to zero there are going to be expectations that you do manage your finances in a right way.” This message was “a little bit hard” for some deans to hear, but the provost was candid and open in his explanation of the situation. “It wasn't like [the provost] was treating one unit any differently than any other unit.”

A finance director in one college echoed this depiction of the provost. The provost was “really the best” of the lot during the administrator’s long tenure at the university for being “very logical,” “balanced” and “fair.” This finance director recounted numerous examples of the provost posing penetrating questions of deans and other colleagues. “It was that [the provost] wanted to know in their mind that they had dotted their ‘i’s’, and crossed their ‘t’s’ ... so [the provost] wanted to hear, so what is your response to that? ... [the provost] knew what questions to ask.” By asking “the hard questions,” the provost established a degree of accountability with deans that had not always existed with previous provosts. This finance director argues that deans “aren’t accountable” or are “less accountable,” if they know their provost will not ask penetrating questions about academic and fiscal planning. An administrator in the provost's office who has worked with many provosts at the university describes the current provost as "fantastic" for

understanding "the linkages between finances and the academic mission." In contrast, former provosts – some of whom became successful university presidents elsewhere – did not understand "numbers" or want to "make decisions."

The provost is master of the Campus Budget model across campus, but deans serve as the chief academic and budget officers of their colleges. Deans are actually responsible for managing the budgets of their colleges. As explained in one university document, deans are expected to not only be academic leaders, but also “savvy” financial managers and “responsible stewards” of their college’s budget. An internal financial memo extols the benefits of decentralization, stating, "the academic leadership closest to the particular circumstances make the best decisions concerning those circumstances." The provost and president develop the university’s “overarching ... goals, values and initiatives,” but the deans retain “a lot of latitude” in how to “interpret” these goals and “how to implement them.” One respondent memorably recalled a former president proclaiming that academic deans were “the princes of the institution.”

Administrators in the provost’s office describe this decanal authority as a unique strength of Sprawling University. A senior central administrator argues,

One of our real strengths of the university, in my view, is that we have, have, with respect to strategic issues, a very decentralized model. We give a lot of discretion to the deans. We believe that what's the best way to run a college of music is probably very different from the best way to run a college of medicine.

Another administrator echoes this point, explaining, “because we’re decentralized, we put the decision making down to the individual colleges, and they’re in the best position to decide how it is that they’re going to use resources.” Decentralization enables – requires – deans to own “all of the strategic and tactical work” in their colleges.

Administrators in the provost office, however, caution that one consequence of the university's decentralization is that colleges can suffer through ineffective deans. One administrator in the provost's office concedes, "the whole election of deans and training of deans, we don't do it very well. I don't think there's anybody who does." With respect to financial management, this administrator identifies three common problems with deans. First, due to the complexities of the Campus Budget model, deans who possess little appreciation or knowledge of budget systems can easily become overwhelmed with managing their resources. "You could tell when someone doesn't do money very well. You can just tell someone who is not financial savvy." In these instances, administrators in the provost's office "form a really close alliance" with the college's finance director. "It's really important that when there is a dean who is struggling with that, that their finance director is right on top of it."

Second, some deans pursue ambitious visions that overextend their financial resources. "We have some colleges that have ... great visionary deans, but there is real disconnect between what they want to do realistically, the resources that they have available to do it." If deans do not "connect those two," then the college suffers. Third, deans have to be willing "to make hard decisions" and "be able to say no." "They can't just say yes to everybody that comes in their door. It's very clear that there have been some deans that can't do that. The result is that they don't spend the resources wisely and then they get in a position where they don't have sufficient resources." Worse yet, some deans "make a decision and then go back on it." In contrast, the "good deans" stand by their academic and financial decisions, trying "to communicate and be transparent about why is it that you're doing it, so that your faculty appreciate and understand it and are

willing to support it.” In this administrator’s experience, the provost’s office is required “to clean up the mess” of too many ineffective deans after their term(s). “You get to the end of a dean's tenure, and the next dean coming in ... you'd have to spend multi-million dollars of bringing [their college] back to a break-even point, and clean up whatever carry forward deficit was there. That just doesn’t seem to make much sense.”

On occasion, colleges and provost's office are forced to wait out ineffective deans for years. "That's definitely the case ... In one case, there was a dean who was hired. At the end of the first year, my thought was we made a mistake. We should just admit the mistake and move on." Yet this administrator appreciated that dismissing the dean was not realistic, even if "it was really painful." But to this administrator’s amazement, this dean was reappointed to a second term, which extended "the mistake." "Having to carry someone, a unit for that long of a period of time is hard. It's somewhat frustrating."

Another administrator in the provost’s office echoes this frustration with some deans. More bluntly, this administrator characterizes the quality of deans as ranging from “great, wonderful, takes charge, leader” to “whack job, no clue what’s going on, can’t get through to them” to “holy crap, we’re in big trouble.” “There is still bad behavior that goes on, unfortunately.”

In fact, this central administrator minimizes the extent to which the provost’s office has authority over deans on budgetary issues. “We can only make requests ... you’re just there to provide guidance.” While administrators in the provost’s office sometimes raise concerns about deans with the provost, who might then approach the deans with their concerns, administrators in the provost’s office mostly focus on reminding deans and their finance directors about the financial consequences of their

decisions. “In corporate, when you’re at the center, you’re saying what should be done.” In contrast, at Sprawling University, most administrators in the provost’s office “don’t have any ability to go to a dean ... or a finance director and say, ‘You can’t do that, you can’t hire those five new staff members’ ... We can only say if you hire these five new staff members you may be falling into a structural deficit.” Within these constraints, administrators in the provost’s office frame their role as developing relationships with finance directors in the colleges to “make sure that [deans] don’t make any really bad mistakes that will put [their colleges] and the university at risk.”

### **Navigating a Complex Budget Framework**

Without fail, deans and administrators in the provost’s office underscore the complexity of the Campus Budget model. During interviews, senior administrators stressed that the model affords deans more academic and budgetary responsibility than their counterparts at peer institutions. One former senior central administrator, for example, immediately noted, “what deans do, their roles in different institutions, varies widely, and so it’s harder to speak generally about deans. Our deans actually have quite a bit of authority relative to say deans [at a peer institution].”

The profiled deans echo this assessment. While describing his previous experience as a dean at two peer institutions, Dean Huxley argued, “first of all, we have a pretty distinctive way of budgeting.” Similarly, Dean Joyce argued that the budget model affords colleges “a substantial amount of independence.” The deans offer both praise and caution while describing the decentralized nature of the Campus Budget model. Dean Conrad warns, “be careful what you wish for” to senior administrators at other

universities who are considering implementing a decentralized budget model. On one hand, he believes "it's a great way to run a university" because deans are more knowledgeable about a college's opportunities and problems than the provost. "To me the true independence is the academic independence, the creativity part."

Dean Conrad, however, cautions that the model presents its perils. Deficits "can easily get out of control" in this framework. Dean Stowe also warns that "it is very easy to generate" deficits. Tales of deans encountering fiscal distress across campus do not surprise her. Deans can generate deficits "unintentionally" by making decisions without understanding the corresponding fiscal consequences. During her first term, Dean Stowe wanted to improve the selectivity of the college because faculty were "talking about the quality of students" and the college's "selectivity factor was not good." To improve selectivity, she decided to decrease enrollment for the upcoming year; she recommended this strategy fully knowing that tuition was essential to the college's revenues. "I knew that. I made the decision." Yet she still underestimated the negative consequences. "But I didn't understand all of the ramifications," including how the provost's office disburses tuition revenues to colleges. The decision did not "damage" the college – its reserves acted as a "buffer" – but the dean learned a valuable lesson. "The level of hurt surprised me ... it doesn't take much of a drop of enrollment to have fairly far-reaching ramifications into our budget."

### **Navigating A Deteriorating Fiscal Environment**

In recent decades, Sprawling University has experienced waning state support like many public universities. After adjusting for inflation, per-student support from the state

has declined by 40 percent over the past decade. In actual dollars, the university's state appropriation is now 10 percent less than it was a decade ago. Over the past 25 years, state appropriations have steadily constituted a smaller percentage of general fund revenues, decreasing from 50 percent of general fund revenues to less than 20 percent.

In response to declining levels of state support, Sprawling has increased tuition and fees to generate more revenues. Tuition now constitutes 70 percent of general fund revenues, whereas it accounted for 40 percent of revenues 25 years ago. Over the past decade, the ratio of general fund revenues from tuition as compared to those from state appropriations has increased from 2 to 1 to 4 to 1. Despite its growing reliance on tuition revenues, the institution has managed to increase tuition at lower rates than many of its public and private peer institutions.

In recent years, Sprawling has also navigated increased uncertainty with its research funding. During the time of this study, the institution was grappling with the prospect of absorbing cuts to federal research funding due to sequestration. The university receives research funding from federal agencies, including the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation. In fact, the federal government provides two of every three dollars spent on research at the university. In one public forum, a senior administrator criticized sequestration, calling it a "meat cleaver" solution to the federal government's budget problems. "This could be quite painful for us." This administrator also anticipated sustained uncertainty over federal funding, fearing that the funding environment is "certainly not going to be very robust."



## Containing Costs to Maintain Excellence

Amidst this deteriorating fiscal environment, administrators in the provost's office celebrate their efforts to secure and protect the university's financial future by containing costs. In one public forum, a senior administrator described the university's challenge as continuing to "improve" amidst a "very tough environment." Not surprisingly, "resilience" is a word often used across Sprawling University to describe efforts to adapt to fiscal uncertainty. The provost's office touts the institution's ability to navigate this environment, crediting its "disciplined approach to financial management," which integrates budget planning, cutting costs and reallocating expenditures to the institution's highest priorities. During the annual budget review, for example, deans are required to redistribute a certain percentage of their operating expenses to other activities.

To date, administrators in the provost's office have delivered on pledges to contain costs. In the 2000s, administrators emphasized decreasing expenditures on facilities and procurement. The university began leveraging its scale as a purchaser to negotiate favorable prices with suppliers. It also cut utility costs by retrofitting existing facilities, experimenting with energy efficient systems and encouraging sustainable behaviors on campus. These efforts were a success – a *real* success. Sprawling eliminated *millions* of dollars in recurring expenditures, recapturing some of the savings to redistribute to other activities. In response to the global recession, the provost's office extended cost containment into new domains, including restructuring employee benefits, reducing energy usage and consolidating technology services. This wave of cuts affected colleges in new ways – courses with lower enrollments were not offered as often (or at

all), travel budgets were decreased and retiring staff was not necessarily replaced. These sustained efforts eliminated additional *millions* of dollars in recurring costs.

One administrator in the provost's office attributes the institution's fiscal health to the discipline of senior administrators more than to good fortune. "We have been very strict and diligent about trimming so that we can do other things." As a result, the university has "a lot of resources" as compared to peer institutions. Central administrators stress that cutting costs creates resources for the academic mission. One administrator in the provost's office, for example, believes "jumping on the cost containment band wagon" has "added up to a lot" of savings. In particular, the university's approach has enabled administrators to "reallocate resources away" from activities it "used to do" into "new areas of investment."

The future portends intensifying fiscal pressures, but with fewer opportunities to realize significant costs savings. In the words of one dean, Sprawling seems to have exhausted opportunities to cut "the things that nobody really notices." One senior administrator applauds the university for trying its "absolute best" to anticipate and adjust to shifts in state support, but also concedes that it is becoming more difficult to respond every year. Yet the provost's office has targeted additional millions of dollars in recurring costs to curtail. Over the next decade, for example, the provost's office plans to further centralize financial services and reduce staffing. Whereas earlier containment efforts focused on reallocating savings to different general fund activities, current efforts now emphasize securing alternative revenue sources – external grants and endowment income – to fund activities such as faculty salaries and financial aid.

Despite their success with reallocating expenditures, administrators in the provost's office acknowledge that sustained cost containment threatens academic quality throughout the university. A recurrent theme across campus is "we can't do this forever." But administrators swear by the necessity of containment. In one internal memorandum, senior administrators explain, "we will be required to look deeper into the academic enterprise for efficiency opportunities, but we continue to make every effort to protect the excellence of the educational experience as we make reductions." Despite its perils, administrators in the provost's office are convinced that cutting costs provides critical resources for developing new academic programs, recruiting and retaining elite faculty and increasing financial aid.

### **Anticipating Continued Fiscal Stress**

Despite the prudence of the provost's office, the profiled academic deans anticipate continued stress over fiscal issues in the years to come. First, the provost's office has communicated that state appropriations are unlikely to rebound. One dean, for example, described the "explicit frame" of the annual budget conference with the provost as learning to live with the "permanent" change of lower levels of state support. "State funding is not coming back, it's not going lower right now, but it's so low that – state funding is even more gone than it was before." This dean stresses that the provost's message about state appropriations was "explicit" and "not subtle." "The financial climate is changing ... There was a signal about it. It was a flashing neon sign."

Second, the provost's office has fewer resources to fund special initiatives due to these constrictions on the university's budget. One dean explained that the provost's

office has helped to fund initiatives in the colleges for many years. “As long as you were running your ship pretty well, you could get new ideas financed with a reasonable rate of success from the provost office.” But the provost has conveyed “pretty clearly” to the deans “that’s not going to happen as much anymore.” This dean summarizes the provost’s message, saying,

The ability to undertake major new investments funded by the center is getting limited. Basically, the provosts’ discretionary budget is shrinking more than the rest of the university’s budget is growing, but the provost’s discretionary budget’s shrinking, meaning that it’s harder for the provost to finance new initiatives that help shape the direction of the university. They’ve been very clear about that and what that means.

The lesson for the dean is that “we’re more on our own bottoms than we were before.” “It’s more up to us to find the resources and probably will be for a while.” Moreover, the provost’s office has committed more of its shrinking resources to new priorities such as financial aid. “We’re in good shape [as a university], but there’s been a significant shift in how we spend our money in recent years. That’s been clearly communicated and I think we understand that.” This dean does not fret over the university’s financial future; the university’s budget remains “in very solid shape” and its “[financial] fundamentals are very good.” But the provost has signaled that finances “are getting tighter.”

Third, deans sense that the Board of Trustees has become more concerned with the university’s budget situation. In particular, the board has become less tolerant of expectations to raise tuition and fees. One dean perceives increasing tension, or a “fairly acrimonious” difference of opinion, between trustees and the provost’s office over tuition. The board not only expects the provost’s office to cut costs from the budget, but also to balance the budget without significant increases in tuition rates. Another dean

describes this expectation as a new “constriction” for the provost’s office, arguing, “we are not going to be able to raise tuition much.” Another dean echoes this perception of the board’s attitude about tuition rates – trustees are unlikely to approve increases in tuition without accompanying budget cuts. “I kind of am concerned that we’re going to see that whole climate playing out here with something that I think could be very, very difficult for [the university] to weather fiscally.”

The board’s expectations, however, extend beyond holding tuition rates. One dean claims, “there’s still a lot of tension” between the provost’s office and the board over the budget. In part, the board’s “pressure” on the provost’s office stems from containment targets that “have been promised to the trustees.” Yet this dean believes some of the pledges for additional cuts are unrealistic. “I don’t see how what they’re proposing to do can save the kind of money they’ve promised the trustees.” Moreover, this dean notes that the board is applying more pressure on the provost’s office to push colleges to spend their existing reserves. This message has cascaded from trustees to the provost to the deans: spend your surplus funds before asking for any additional resources. This dean believes the board is now analyzing budget indicators, including fund balances and endowment income with increased scrutiny. The provost and vice provost have specifically informed the deans that trustees are “looking at colleges with high carry over,” advising the deans that “you have got to do something about it.” “I think [the trustees] always looked at [the budget] but I think under the set of budget constraints of this time period they’re looking at it more pointedly ... They’ve been always asking pointed questions, but the results didn’t make that big of difference.”

One dean argues that the continued emphasis on containing costs, including initiatives to consolidate financial and human resources services, increasingly expose a “very complex” set of tensions across campus. This dean believes that fiscal uncertainty across campus has “enabled” the provost’s office “to pull a lot of things” into “more structurally centralized forms,” including this reorganization of administrative functions. This practice has exposed “almost existential questions” about the university. From this dean’s perspective, many of the university’s strengths are also its weaknesses; it continues “to struggle with its identity as a very large, very distributed institution.” “I think there’s a frustration centrally with not being able to fashion powerful messages about the institution, because we’re so broad and disparate.”

Associate deans and financial directors in colleges describe the university’s fiscal future in similar terms. One finance director argues the university was “in a much better place” several decades ago. “We were getting huge dollars from the state, tuition was going up at reasonable rates” and faculty and staff would receive 10-percent merit increases “without blinking an eye.” He remembers when there was less emphasis on “whittling out the nuances” of budget requests because the provost’s office could “pretty much grant anything.” But now, the “world has changed” and “there’s no money out there.” In response, the provost’s office has “to look at things, at everything in new ways”; there is “a lot more scrutiny” of the budget. “It’s an evolving process, not to say that nobody twenty years ago was interested in this stuff, but I don’t think we had to look at it.” Due to increasing insecurity over resources from the state and shifting expectations from the board, the provost’s office has been “driven towards having to analyze

everybody's requests in a way that didn't happen before to determine what things would be of most benefit to both the college and to the university.”

In fact, this finance director believes that the Board of Trustees had intended to hold tuition rates for this past year. “I think that, there was a time, there was, at the beginning of this process, the trustees were saying zero. I think they were very vocal about it.” The ultimate tuition increase was “more than a pittance,” but not “as much as [the provost’s office] wanted.” This finance director credits administrators in the provost’s office with convincing trustees that holding tuition could cause lasting damage to the university. “I do know that the provost’s office has presented certain amounts of information ... they know what they're talking about and I believe that they are very persuasive in demonstrating to the trustees why zero percent would be damaging.”

Associate deans in other colleges describe an increasing sense of insecurity over resources. One associate dean, for example, argues that her colleagues across campus “are now always in the mode of the worst-case scenario.” This administrator perceives “a new paradigm” in which administrators come to expect difficult budget discussions every year, including a perennial concern that there “will be no tuition increases.” An associate dean in another college expresses frustration over the preoccupation of some central administrators with “expense” rather than focusing on “cost.” “The biggest thing for the university right now is we just need to change our paradigm to cost rather than to expense.” This associate believes too many administrators are focused on the computation rather than the concept. The problem for this administrator is that a focus on expense obscures the more important question – what activities should the university be supporting in the first place? “Cost is how much time and effort you put into something.

Cost is useless activities. You might have a budget line for a million dollars for this. Okay, that's expense. But you have to look at things in terms of cost.”

### **Chapter Discussion**

As examined in the Introduction, public research universities across the country have experienced significant fiscal pressures over the past two decades. Sprawling University is no exception. The university has mostly triumphed through stressful times, designing and implementing an impressive array of containment measures, but senior administrators in the president’s office and provost’s office, as well as in the colleges, acknowledge that the university continues to confront fiscal challenges. One consequence of this shifting fiscal environment over the past two decades has been the adoption of a decentralized budget model, the Campus Budget, which bestows increased budgetary responsibility to deans across campus.

This institutional context informs my analysis in several important respects, foreshadowing some findings in subsequent chapters. First, the provost’s office has diminishing capacity to fund special initiatives across campus. As I explain in subsequent chapters, the provost still has millions of dollars to allocate for initiatives that advance the university’s priorities, but importantly, deans acknowledge that these resources are scarcer than in previous years. In the years to come, deans will be increasingly competing against each other for scarce resources from the provost’s office.

Second, with fewer centralized resources to leverage, deans will need to acquire or save resources to pursue their academic agendas. Deans will be expected to be more entrepreneurial – both in terms of charting and implementing their academic visions and



securing resources. During the time of my study, some deans enjoyed the luxury of inheriting substantial budget surpluses from their predecessors. Yet as I will examine in Chapter 9, at the behest of the Board of Trustees, the provost has asked deans to begin spending any surpluses. This sense of resource scarcity, along with the authority bestowed by the Campus Budget model, increases the importance of a dean's approach to shaping academic priorities – for the fortunes of their own college and the institution as a whole. The effect of an exemplary dean, or an ineffective dean, is likely to be more pronounced in the future than in previous eras.

Third, academic deans at Sprawling University have sufficient authority over academic and fiscal affairs in their colleges to meet these changing expectations. Academic deans enjoy significant discretion – substantial independence, in the words of one dean – in shaping the academic and fiscal priorities of their colleges. Deans enjoy significant latitude in translating the university's overarching objectives into priorities that best serve their colleges. Moreover, unless the college encounters serious financial troubles, the provost's office is unlikely to interfere with a dean's process for developing and implementing academic and fiscal priorities.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Shaping Academic Priorities as Dean:**

#### **Exploring the Intersection of Identity, Biography & College Context**

##### **Introduction**

Before exploring how the six profiled academic deans at Sprawling University shape academic priorities during the annual budget review, I first investigate how these deans more broadly make sense of their role in shaping academic priorities. I begin my examination on this subject for several reasons. First, I want to establish a baseline understanding of how the profiled deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities. With this insight, I can better understand the extent to which a dean's approach to shaping academic priorities during the annual budget review reflects a broader approach to shaping priorities. Second, past research in higher education has not explored how deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities. Scholars and former deans have suggested collaborative images of the deanship, arguing that deans should harness the "collective intelligence" of their administrative teams (Krahenbuhl, 2004), invite colleagues to explore problems together (Morris, 1981), interpret and translate the meaning of events (Tierney, 1989) and act as the "hub" of their college's communication network (Morris, 1981). These observers, however, offer few details about how deans perform this collaborative work, including while shaping priorities in their colleges.

In fact, the literature in higher education only begins to explore the range of factors that might affect how academic deans conceive of their work in shaping academic priorities. Albeit sparse, some research indicates that a dean's orientation to leadership and management can be attributed to some of their background characteristics and past experiences as faculty. Del Favero (2005, 2006a, 2006b) explored the relationship between the personal characteristics of deans and their management styles. In one study, she analyzed whether there was a relationship between the disciplinary background of deans and the "cognitive complexity" of their management style (Del Favero, 2006a, p. 282). This measure of cognitive complexity reflected self-measures from deans on a behavioral-orientation scale derived from Bolman and Deal's four organizational frames. She argued that the disciplinary contexts in pure fields (*e.g.*, chemistry) and high-consensus fields (*e.g.*, physics) were better predictors of deans adopting multi-frame behavior than the disciplinary contexts in applied fields (*e.g.*, engineering) and low-consensus fields (*e.g.*, sociology). With these findings, she implied that deans from pure fields and high-consensus fields might be more effective than deans from other fields.

In other research, however, Del Favero implies a different conclusion concerning the relationship between the leadership styles of academic deans and their disciplinary background. She mapped the activities of academic deans to Bolman and Deal's four frames, concluding that deans from applied and low-consensus fields tend to adopt social behaviors that reflect collegial and political orientations to management, whereas deans from pure and high-consensus fields tend to adopt bureaucratic orientations of management. She argued that deans from low-consensus fields were more open to "sharing ideas" with their colleagues and "to make sense of data and come to a common

understanding of problem-solving cues” (Del Favero, 2005, p. 85). In different research, she found that incoming deans come to the position with some set of expectations due to their past experiences as professors and administrators. She argued that her research indicates, “the influence of academic discipline on administrative behavior may be more complex than we know” (Del Favero, 2006a, p. 306).

The insights from these studies begin to imply a relationship between a dean’s leadership style and their disciplinary background, but offer an incomplete set of the personal and professional characteristics that probably forge how deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities. Within the conceptual context of sensemaking, a rich set of factors would influence how academic deans make sense of their roles in shaping academic priorities. First, the fiscal and social context of a dean’s college might inform their approach to shaping academic priorities. A dean who presides over a college with a surplus, for example, might have more flexibility in shaping academic priorities; a dean could either be more judicious, insisting on consulting with the right people about the right set of priorities at the right time, or more daring, proposing riskier initiatives that present consequential upsides and downsides without feeling a need to seek the blessing of individuals. In contrast, a dean presiding over a poorer college might have less flexibility; a necessity to improve the bottom line might frustrate attempts to shape priorities beyond addressing immediate fiscal concerns. Moreover, a college’s fiscal context probably affects the relationship between a dean and the university’s provost. In particular, a dean presiding over a college in deficit might encounter more monitoring, scrutiny and intervention from the provost’s office about their priorities.

Second, identity might affect how deans conceptualize their role in shaping priorities. The professional of identities of deans could inform different approaches to shaping priorities, depending on their perceptions of what it means to act like a dean. Within the context of Sprawling University, deans might perceive a need to demonstrate their authority over priorities as the chief academic and budgetary officers of their colleges; this interpretation could prompt deans to assume an active or even directive role in shaping priorities. Alternatively, as faculty-turned-administrators, deans might still identify as professors at heart, prompting them to adopt a consultative approach that embodies collegial norms. As noted in past research, a dean's disciplinary background might inform their perspective on their approach to shaping academic priorities. Along with professional identity, dimensions of social identity of deans might also inform their approach to shaping priorities, including their gender and religious faith.

Third, the life experiences of deans inside and outside of academe might affect how they envision their role in shaping academic priorities. The lessons learned over academic careers from experiences with former deans – both positive and negative – probably informs their expectations as deans. Moreover, deans might have administrative experiences such as serving as associate dean or department chair that inform their perspective on how deans should shape academic priorities. In addition, deans might have other life experiences that inform their approach, including leadership experiences outside of academe in their professional and personal lives.

In this chapter, I begin to close gaps in the literature on academic deans, exploring how the six profiled academic deans have made sense of their role in shaping academic priorities. During interviews with deans, I discovered that a rich tapestry of professional

and personal factors affects how the profiled academic deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities. In fact, the disciplinary background of academic deans is only one of several key considerations that affect how the profiled deans conceptualize their roles in shaping academic profile. As available, I have used the words of deans to brand their signature approaches.

## **Findings**

### **Dean Conrad – The Instigator**

#### *Accentuating Research Mission*

Dean Conrad has developed a clear sense of Sprawling University's mission as a dean, department chair and professor – the university prioritizes research and innovation. “To be successful at Sprawling University, you have to understand the environment that you're working in ... a place like Sprawling puts a premium on creativity and innovation.” He explains,

When you come in here you know what Sprawling is, you know what the university's reputation is, what they consider to be their core values, and each college is expected to reflect those values in their own particular way. For example, every college at the university prides itself on being a research-intensive organization that has a number of people of intellect that really tries to take that reputation down to the student, so the educational programs tend to be also equally demanding on the part of the student, to be reflective, innovative and creative.

The dean tries to align the college's activities with these values. “The [college] has to demonstrate very clearly its linkage to the university at large ... We know what the mission of the university is, we know what their values and expectations are.”

Not surprisingly, Dean Conrad's vision for the college emphasizes faculty research. "I think everybody believes that scholarship and ... innovation is key to our success and key to our being looked at or looked upon as a peer institution." The dean wants the college to "shape" the meaning of "scientific leadership" in the discipline. "We continue to think ahead as to where the next scientific challenge is going to be and begin to build in those directions before perhaps other people." With this perspective, Dean Conrad prioritizes recruiting and hiring "outstanding" faculty who are "at the top of their game." This vision also extends to the recruitment of department chairs. "When I hire [chairs], I hire them because I told them very explicitly that ... that's why we're hiring you – to upgrade the science in the department."

The dean's focus on research reflects his tenure at multiple public and private research universities. Dean Conrad realized he wanted to "combine a research career with a teaching career" while completing interdisciplinary graduate work at an Ivy League university. Before coming to Sprawling, he held faculty positions at several research universities and began pursuing leadership opportunities such as directing a research institute. "Leadership was always an opportunity that I was looking at." He first came to Sprawling to direct and "resurrect" a smaller unit in the college; and then he was asked to serve as a department chair, eventually serving as chair of numerous departments. "I was really all about opportunities for leadership. Whether it would be leadership as a scientist, leadership as a faculty member and a scientist at the same time. Sort of position yourself to become leaders in your discipline to finally a deanship."

As a department chair, Dean Conrad seized the opportunity to "develop an identity" that "separated us from our peers." He molded the department in his own image

by hiring faculty to develop “a unique educational and research environment.” He emphasized innovation and research, recruiting faculty who espoused his vision of academic excellence. “What I did was to recruit [faculty] I thought would contribute scientifically to the college or the university who would be, who themselves I think had great leadership potential.” As a chair, he began envisioning an opportunity to lead a college – and his discipline – as a dean. “As a department chair, I was able to ... mold faculty and programs. I thought I’d like to do this at a college level and ... push the college in a direction I felt was important [for the discipline].” He first left the university to become a dean at a peer institution, but then returned to the college as dean.

Dean Conrad believes that deans at research universities need to be successful researchers. “Somebody asks you, ‘How do you become a dean?’ I said, ‘Well, you become a dean by becoming a really good faculty member’ ... if you’re not really an outstanding faculty member, you’re probably not going to be a very good dean.” As an accomplished researcher, Dean Conrad can “feel good” in his “own skin”; without this belief, he would not feel confident as dean. “If you’re insecure coming into this job, you’re done ... I’ve been a competitive scientist, I can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with anybody on this campus ... if you feel that way, you’re able to accomplish a lot more.”

He punctuates this point, arguing,

If you yourself have not participated in that [competitive environment], it’s a little harder to be able to make those kind of [decisions]. Now you can delegate it to somebody but it’s not the same. There’s a lot of high fliers here and if you come in here as a dean and feel insecure, you’re going to fail.



Without success as a researcher, Dean Conrad fears he would not enjoy the respect of prominent faculty colleagues. “I’ve been places where deans frankly ... they’re not respected by their faculty because they’ve never walked the walk.”

### *Entrusting Faculty with Priorities*

With his focus on research, Dean Conrad believes that faculty determine the fate of academic priorities more than administrators. He compares the faculty’s role to the dean’s role, saying, “at the end of the day, it’s very clear that the dean can’t do all the teaching, can’t do all the [research]. It’s up to the faculty.” The faculty determine whether proposals and initiatives actually become reality throughout the college. “When the faculty take ownership for whether it’d be the teaching program, whether it’d be the research, it’s going to be successful.”

With this perspective, the dean seeks input from faculty on academic priorities, especially “politicking” the “high fliers” in the college. “The idea is not to make everybody happy, just the *right* people happy – and the right people are the leaders here in the faculty who are producers, who are visionaries and who themselves look at leadership as a career path.” In particular, Dean Conrad wants the department chairs to shape academic priorities in the college. He avoids meddling with the chairs, extending them “a lot of flexibility and freedom,” which he preferred as a chair. As dean, he tries to articulate a vision for the chairs. “They look at me just sort of create a vision that they can buy into.” He then expects the chairs to be “advocates” of his vision. “I look at [the chairs] as somebody who’s going to reshape the department in a way that I think is important; and if you think it’s important, then you’ll do the job.”

Dean Conrad acknowledges that privileging the department chairs generates “creative tension” and “differences of opinion” between chairs and the dean’s office. “The chairs tend to look at the dean as some days like an adversary ... this is their group and then there’s the [associate] deans over here.” He attributes this perspective to the different expectations of each group. A department chair’s “priority is to make sure their faculty ... comes first.” “I think there are some [chairs] who are more somewhat self-interested in doing things that may not necessarily be detrimental to the college, but there’s a clear positive benefit for their department rather than the college.” In contrast, the dean needs to consider the best interests of the whole college. “My role is to make sure that I see things at a higher level. Sometimes what they perceive as good for their department may not be entirely in the best interest of the college.” To diffuse this tension with department chairs, he focuses on opportunities of mutual interest or “where everyone benefits.” “I think they, what to an outsider may look like as somewhat contentious, it’s just ... trying to come up with a compromise position that everybody’s going to feel as though the college is going to benefit from.”

### *Prodding the Faculty*

Although Dean Conrad believes faculty own the college’s academic priorities, he envisions deans assuming a specific role in shaping them. “My role is to be an instigator in a very positive way,” trying to “get faculty off the dime.” Deans should provide “a stimulus” that the faculty can “take hold of.” Dean Conrad wants faculty “to understand why” initiatives are “important.” He does not tell faculty “what to do,” but suggests why they should take action. In most instances, “academic excellence” is the dean’s rationale.

“I try to frame everything with regard to why this college is as excellent as it is” and “get their sense of what they believe makes this place excellent.”

The college’s recent implementation of a new curriculum reflects the dean’s approach to shaping priorities. Several years ago, Dean Conrad articulated a vision for the college that prioritized multidisciplinary knowledge, which stimulated conversations about transforming the college’s curriculum. The dean deliberately did not “interfere” in these initial discussions among the faculty, department chairs and associate deans. Instead he looked to the chairs and associate deans to collaborate with faculty to develop a new curriculum. “My role was to sort of create a vision to engage in a college-wide dialogue into that vision, then ultimately having its final form crafted by the faculty.”

Dean Conrad ascribes his approach to a strong preference for avoiding “any top-down sort of micromanaging.” As a department chair, the dean worked with some deans who “interfered” too much with academic initiatives, which frustrated him. “I’ve seen what happens when all of a sudden it’s a top-down decision – and you get things done, but not very well.” From the dean’s perspective, “the worst thing” a dean can do is “tell” the faculty what “to do,” which leads to running “into brick walls.” “That to me is dumb; then you won’t get anything done. That’s micromanaging at its worst.”

With this perspective, Dean Conrad espouses a collaborative approach to shaping priorities with the faculty. “It’s certainly anything but top down.” He describes his approach as “very consultative,” espousing a practice of “open dialogue.” The dean tries to listen more than talk during monthly faculty meetings and weekly senior team meetings with department chairs, associate deans and administrative directors. He describes this forum as an opportunity for members of the senior team to discuss issues in

the college. “The idea here is getting people to take ownership of ideas ... I do the same thing as I normally do – I instigate a conversation, I sit back and listen to them.” To begin these meetings, Dean Conrad often offers an update such as outlining the implications of sequestration on the college’s research grants. After introducing the first agenda item, he mostly disappears from discussion, even while sitting at the head of the conference table.

During these discussions, Dean Conrad wants the department chairs and associate deans to “flush out” their ideas. “They are trying to get their opinions off the table. That to me is important.” The dean describes these meetings as “lively exchanges.” The associate deans and chairs assemble as a group, but channels of talk mostly resemble a queue of individuals offering comments to the dean. A discussion of the curriculum, for example, features chairs directing their opinions to the dean rather than to each other or associate deans who were actually coordinating implementation of the curriculum. Dean Conrad avoids redirecting discussion, even after chairs start making personal critiques of administrators and other colleagues motion for the dean to deescalate tensions. By design, Dean Conrad prefers a “hands-off” approach during these discussions. “One of the things that I try to do with those meetings is to sort of let the conversation flow and to find its own direction. And chime in when I think it’s gone astray too far.”

In addition to team meetings, Dean Conrad relies on one-on-one meetings to engage department chairs and associate deans. The “meeting after the meeting” has become folklore in the college; ideas are introduced in larger forums and then explored in detail during one-on-one discussions. Dean Conrad explains, “I sort of lay out in a faculty meeting and then I began to talk to ... leaders in the faculty, one-on-one – many times in small groups.” He leverages smaller settings to not only clarify ideas, but also generate

support for them. “I spend a lot of time sort of behind the scenes getting the right people on board.” The dean’s experience as a chair motivates this approach. “I saw places where it was a vacuum; decisions made were sort of less than transparent. I also saw places where ... basically, it was a free for all and nothing got done.”

Although Dean Conrad emphasizes “really engaging people in dialogue,” he concedes that many decisions in the college are his to make. “I make it very clear – this isn’t a democracy.” The college, for example, “does not vote” on budgets. Deans need to balance “meaningful dialogue” and “being indecisive.” “Sometimes, I have to make decisions that don’t make them happy, but at least they’ve had a say. But at the end of the day, I say, ‘You know folks, at the end of the day I’m the one who has to pull the trigger.’” Dean Conrad reiterates this point, arguing that “the buck stops” in the dean’s office because he is the “one person who’s ultimately responsible for the college.”

### *Meeting the Provost’s Expectations*

Dean Conrad knows how the provost will judge his performance as dean. First, keep your college out of fiscal trouble. “The provost wants to make sure that number one, everybody is staying on the tracks and not running off the tracks, particularly a public university where resources tend to be very tight and restricted.” Second, enhance the academic stature of your college. “As long as you [don’t] run [the college] off the rails financially ... and really position your college among the very best in the county, then it [is] going to be an easy ... relationship with the provost.” Dean Conrad believes that the provost judges the college on the extent to which it promotes innovation. “Each college is held accountable to demonstrate that it's doing that. It's walking the walk.”

Dean Conrad believes that he has met these expectations, establishing “very positive” relationships with provosts during his tenure. “Any time you're rank in the top one or two colleges in the country, any time your graduates, any time you get people winning all awards, any time you're making the university look good, there's never a problem.” In fact, the dean cannot recall ever having a “negative conversation” or “disagreement” with a provost, despite acknowledging queries from provosts about a structural deficit in the dean’s office. “Like anything else, you put yourself in the position where you can always have that [positive] conversation by really excelling.”

In recent years, Dean Conrad describes the provost’s office as being “very complimentary” of the college’s “strong research program” and “innovative” curriculum. The dean senses that the provost supports his multidisciplinary vision for the college’s research agenda and educational programs, including recruiting faculty who collaborate across colleges. “I think the provost sees the value in what we do; we’re just not doing things that benefit us, but we’re doing things, developing programs, developing relationships that really could benefit several colleges.” The provost is “very supportive” of how the dean has “positioned the college in the university.” Dean Conrad, for example, received congratulations from a president of a peer institution who had heard Sprawling’s president complimenting the college. “We’re looked at as a player.”

### **Dean Austen – The Resurrector**

#### *Making a Difference*

Dean Austen characterizes herself as “an accidental dean.” “I never intended to be a dean, ever. *Ever*. If you’d asked me in graduate school, ‘do you want to be a dean?’ I

would have said, ‘Horrors, no!’” After becoming dean, a colleague from graduate school joked with her, “You know, if we’d had an election back when we were in graduate school together ... on the student least likely to be dean, you would have won.”

Despite this sentiment, Dean Austen has spent much of her career as an academic administrator. She first became a department chair when her chair became ill. After several years, an incoming dean recruited her to serve as an associate dean. “The new dean came to me and said ... I want someone to run the school.” The dean asked her to manage internal affairs such as academic programs and student issues while he managed external affairs. “My colleagues called me the underboss.” She accepted the offer, but planned to return to the faculty after her term. “I figured ... it might be kind of interesting to see what the dean's office is all about ... then I'm going back to the faculty.”

Dean Austen, however, began to reconsider her career path while serving as an associate dean. First, she discovered that “you really can make a difference” as an administrator. “You can make a difference to individuals – to individual students, to individual faculty. You can make a difference to small groups. You can make a difference to the organization. What you do can really matter.” She began wanting to establish a larger legacy as a dean. “One of the things that I think about a lot is what's going to come after me. Meaning, not who's going to succeed me, but what am I going to leave behind? You can leave something good behind that's tangible.” Second, she anticipated being a “good” dean after reflecting on her skills. Her research interests, for example, intersect administration. “You soon understand that this is like a living laboratory ... this is the real deal.” As a dean, she could “actually try out theories.”

As an associate dean, Dean Austen started to receive inquiries about deanships across the country. She began “testing the waters,” ultimately, accepting a deanship at a peer institution. She “accomplished a lot” in her first deanship. “Everything was smooth, as smooth as it ever gets for a dean ... I felt I still could do some ... I still had some left.” She dismissed inquiries about other positions, but became intrigued by an opening at Sprawling University after speaking with the chair of the search committee. The college had amassed a “*massive*” budget deficit; it had “problems that were fixable, but serious.”

Through these discussions, Dean Austen concluded that she was the right person to lead the college’s turnaround. First, the dean’s academic training and administrative experience could help address the college’s problems. Second, she has “a strong commitment to public education.” She believes that Sprawling University is one of the public institutions that has “any prayer” of competing with elite private universities, “saving us from total domination by the privates.” The decision to accept the position seemed clear after considering these factors. “I don't think this is really too grandiose, because this is the opportunity I saw. Here's a chance to really, greatly increase the probability that [Sprawling] stays in that top group.”

### *Orchestrating Fiscal Turnaround*

Despite the college’s prestigious reputation, Dean Austen realized that the college confronted “really serious problems.” “Pompeii” is how she describes the scene upon arriving as dean. The college “was clearly at risk.” The most obvious problem was the college’s deficit. The stress of the deficit was exacerbated by questions of how it ballooned into such a “mammoth” state. “Almost no one in the college was aware of it.”



The deficit, which was discovered by administrators in the provost's office, created "an acrimonious debate" between the previous dean and the provost's office. "Everything that could be wrong was wrong."

Before accepting the position, Dean Austen spent "a lot of time" – "tons of hours" – talking with the provost about the deficit. She appreciated the provost's candor and "full disclosure" in explaining the college's problems. Without previous experience as a dean, she doubts even knowing what questions to ask the provost about the college's deficit. "No way, *no way*, could I possibly have figured this out. No way. I just wouldn't know enough, the detail." She recalls saying, "this is not a job for a baby dean ... you'd better get someone who's been a dean before, just to understand the deficit."

From these discussions, Dean Austen realized that mastering the Campus Budget model offered a critical "path" out of deficit. "I had to have the confidence that I understood all the levers, the operating levers, and could pull them to make this thing work." She negotiated a financial settlement with the provost's office: the provost agreed to "eat some" of the deficit, while the dean agreed to cover the remaining debt by liquidating assets. The dean and provost agreed to a repayment schedule that included incentives for early repayment, which was developed in concert with the college's finance director. Importantly, Dean Austen assumed responsibility for some debt even though it had been accumulated before her tenure. "That was a very big risk that I took. I could have pushed it all at the provost, but I found that to be unwise for future relationships." Through these conversations with the provost's office, Dean Austen began to reestablish trust between the dean's office and the provost's office.

Instead of belaboring the cause of the deficit, Dean Austen focused on understanding potential solutions. “I tried to understand, where are we exactly? ... What is university's budget model? How can we get out? What is the university prepared to do? What do we need to do? In detail. In *detail*.” The college’s finance director echoes the dean’s can-do attitude about the deficit. “I wasn’t involved in how it got there. In a way, it was nice. You could say, ‘I wasn’t part of how it got here, but we’re here now’ ... We’ve just got to get better and fix this and focus on the future.”

Despite this focus on the future, Dean Austen came to understand the roots of the deficit. “There was a lack of financial transparency within the dean's office ... a lack of the hands-on management.” The finance director believes the deficit ballooned out of control for several reasons, including the global recession, which exposed optimistic projections for enrollment and accompanying tuition revenues, and dependence on the revenues of one program. He suspects that the former dean and administrators in the provost’s office were not “paying as close attention to details” because of the prosperous, “heyday” conditions preceding the recession. “You don’t get as good at really sharpening your pencil” in favorable conditions. The university’s accounting and budget models also “compounded” the situation. “We’re already in an environment where ... people are maybe predisposed to say, ‘It’s business stuff. It doesn’t matter. I don’t want to be bothered with it.’ It ... can make even myself, an accounting professional’s head spin.”

### *Renewing Sense of Mission*

The college’s financial hole was made worse by a tenuous relationship between the dean’s office and the college’s faculty. Dean Austen admits that it has taken more

time to understand how to stimulate faculty governance than how to fix the deficit. Upon arriving, she observed a “college at war,” in which there was “seriously bad blood” between the faculty and the dean’s office. “The faculty really had not had productive engagement with the administration for probably ten years.” Despite this strain, the search committee had assured the dean that the faculty was “bursting with ideas.” The dean recalls the committee’s optimistic message. “We want someone to come in and engage us and the ideas will flow forth.”

The faculty’s appetite for change, however, proved less voracious when the dean “opened up the governance process.” Dean Austen came to realize that the faculty “had no practice” with governance. She noticed a frustrating pattern “over and over again” in faculty meetings during her first year. “The model of governance was someone would make a proposal ... the answer's always ‘no.’ Let's say everything that's wrong with it. Let's not propose something different.” This common refrain was “insanity producing.” “We just don't need to change, and everything you propose, we're going to say no to. Everything anyone else proposes, we're going to say no, too, because that's governance.” For the faculty, governance meant fighting with the dean’s office. “Governance is war. It's not governance, it's war. Not war, excuse me, petty skirmishes.”

From these experiences, Dean Austen concluded that she not only needed to fix the deficit, but also engage the faculty to reclaim a sense of mission for the college. “My vision for the college is first, we had to clarify who we are and what we stood for, and have some kind of mission and vision that made sense.” During her first year, for example, the dean noticed that the faculty and staff had a hard time answering fundamental questions such as “who are we?” The faculty could not articulate “what the

college stood for other than [experiential] learning.” An associate dean echoes this sense of ambiguity with the mission. “People, I think, were hungry for something to align to.”

To engage the faculty, the dean and associate deans assembled taskforces to explore specific issues confronting the college. The dean and associate deans began meeting with small groups of faculty during the summer. “There was a lot of good stuff that came out ... but mostly what we got out of that is, everyone was heard ... Everyone got heard on this issue and the case for change got disseminated.” She also met with faculty “individually,” especially senior professors, choosing to visit “everybody in their office.” An associate dean described these efforts as “listening ... talking to a lot of people.” These taskforces also conducted some basic benchmarking on several issues. The faculty’s reaction to the taskforce reports was “shocking.” It was “cold water in the face”; facts and figures illustrated that the college had fallen behind peer institutions on numerous indicators. With this feedback, Dean Austen began to establish a “coalition of the willing” of faculty who agreed that “we need change and we need change now.”

Due to the college’s deficit, Dean Austen did not propose “anything super big” beyond advocating for “obvious changes” that improved the budget. “I did do some things, right in the beginning ... like open sores, let's clean them out, let's bandage them.” Before the budget review, for example, Dean Austen proposed new standards for faculty summer salaries, which decreased expenditures by aligning salaries closer to peer institutions. The dean also agreed to increase enrollment in undergraduate programs, after seeking input from the faculty and the associate deans. “I tried to ... to say, you know, ‘I heard you,’ because I met with tons and tons of people ... Here it is. Boom. The end.” The dean now senses that the faculty want more ownership of the college’s priorities.

“They're generating ideas. They're generating good ideas, and they're taking responsibility and ownership. Innovation is happening.”

The college, however, continues to confront its financial past as it moves forward. The college has little “room for error” because it has few resources for funding initiatives. This lack of reserves will “constrain” the college for “a really long time.” For Dean Austen, the college’s recovery offers a cautionary tale for deans – know your budget and engage your faculty. The dean evokes a famous scene from *Gone with the Wind* to describe the deficit’s footprint. In the scene, the heroine, Scarlett O’Hara, pulls a carrot out of the ground at her family home, Tara, and declares, “I’ll never be hungry again.” This sentiment captures the deficit’s effect on Dean Austen’s perspective as dean. “If you have been through this, you are never going to be hungry again. As God is my witness, I will never be hungry again. We are going to make our numbers. We’re going to make our numbers, I mean that is what it is, it’s that defining crucible.”

### **Dean Joyce – The Extractor**

#### *Serving the College*

Dean Joyce characterizes himself as a professor more than as an administrator. “First and foremost ... I'm still very much a faculty member.” He describes a “leadership journey” that was “quite unexpected.” “It wasn't the plan I had for my career path. I really, actually had an aversion to administration or at least the idea about it as a career. I had no desire to be a department chair or associate dean or dean or anything.” Before becoming dean, he had “little bits and pieces of leadership experience,” but “certainly not

the normal training” for the position. “I was never going to do anything like this. It was ... not the normal path to this and frankly, not a whole lot of experience.”

Before becoming dean, he declined an offer to become an associate dean. “I was pretty uninterested on personal account. It's just not something I really wanted to do.” Eventually, however, he accepted the offer for two reasons. First, the sitting dean’s vision for the college resonated with him, including developing new degree programs and strengthening the budget. “I had a lot of respect for her and was really enthusiastic about her as dean.” Second, he felt a deep sense of loyalty to the college, which was experiencing “a wave of retirements” among the senior faculty. “I figured it was my turn ... I care a lot about the college, so I wanted it to succeed.”

Dean Joyce, however, did not expect to flourish as an associate dean. “I didn't think, frankly, I'd be that good at it. But I figured I could do the job well enough for a couple of years to keep things going for [the dean].” To his surprise – “a total shock” – he “very quickly” realized that he enjoyed his work as an associate dean because it focused on “helping other people.” “I have a strong drive for service, but I didn't realize how much of a service job this was.” This experience transformed his impression of administration. “Basically, the job is to enable the academic side of the college to succeed and the faculty and the students to be really good at what they do.” Despite his initial reluctance, he “really, really enjoyed” administration.

While Dean Joyce was serving as an associate dean, the sitting dean accepted a different leadership position, which created an opening in the dean’s suite. “The dominoes started to fall.” Unbeknownst to Dean Joyce, the outgoing dean had assembled the college’s senior faculty to gauge their support for nominating him as the next dean.

With the faculty's blessing, the outgoing dean championed his appointment to the provost. "It was a big surprise." The provost agreed to the appointment after meeting with the faculty. "Apparently, [the faculty] unanimously supported appointing me as dean. [The provost] supported it and that was it." After several years in the position, he continues to draw inspiration from his sense of loyalty and service to the college. "I'm really glad to be doing something that I hope is helping the college."

### *Extracting Priorities from Faculty*

Dean Joyce has adopted a restrained approach to shaping priorities. "I tend to be an incrementalist; and tend to do a fair bit of information gathering and thinking about things before making major decisions." He did not want to "storm into the situation" without getting his "feet wet." Inside the college, Dean Joyce "didn't come in with a strong agenda of specific initiatives," which he contrasts with other deans who "often come in with more of an agenda that they start trying to implement right away." In part, the context of his appointment enabled this attitude; he was not appointed to "fix" problems in the college. "There wasn't a sense that we needed to suddenly do everything different." Instead he wanted "to continue what [the previous dean] had started," adding, "[The previous dean] included me very closely. We were really a team."

Apart from developing a new degree program, which was initiated by his predecessor, Dean Joyce initially "held back a bit" on formulating new priorities. He wanted to spend time contemplating the college's future direction. "I was assessing – what's the temperature of the faculty? What are the challenges out there in the world?"

Where do we fit inside the university and how's that going?" He explains further,

My agenda was at a more abstract level of thinking the college was really ready to move to a higher level, rather than just continue being what it was or sort of trying to get a little bit better each year. I thought we were ready, for a variety of reasons, to get quite aggressive, make a leap, but how we were going to do that, I wasn't quite sure yet. I spent the first two years nailing that down.

Dean Joyce acknowledges having "advantages" in succeeding a "popular dean" and enjoying a "high level of trust" with the faculty. For several years, his deanship was "in a bit of a holding pattern." "I had a bit a longer honeymoon than normally a leader would."

Outside the college, Dean Joyce also pursued a restrained approach. Despite securing the provost's support during the appointment process, the dean "was tentative at first" with the provost. "I wanted to be careful about what I could expect of the provost, what I could push [the provost] on, what [the provost] expected of me." He pursued a similar tact with other deans. "I was pretty cautious about asserting myself outside the college." He listened more than talked while serving on the Dean Council. "I participated in discussions, but I didn't assert myself very much there ... I needed to get a feel for how that level of the university worked, not having that experience here or elsewhere."

During his first year, Dean Joyce began to understand what it meant to be dean. "I don't see myself as setting [priorities] – you can't lead an academic institution from the top down." Instead he tries to "extract" priorities from individuals inside and outside the college. As dean, he tries to "help bring different threads together and deal with both finding what the common themes are and what makes them possible." "I view myself as sort of a leader among equals. My job is more facilitating and making things happen and articulating it in a way that helps motivate people." Dean Joyce dismisses any notion that he is the boss – "nobody's going to take orders from me about what we should be doing"



– but believes the deanship affords a unique perspective to shape priorities. He works to identify and understand numerous trade-offs confronting the college. “We do have to make choices. I guess I don't set [priorities], but I do make choices between competing priorities and emphasize some over others. I have a fairly strong responsibility for them.”

To capture a range of perspectives, Dean Joyce aims to communicate “very openly” with faculty and staff. “I'm quite transparent.” In fact, Dean Joyce senses that he might “over-communicate” some information, including details about the budget. “If anything, I tend to over-share.” In retrospect, the dean wonders whether he has “misplayed” his “hand” in the past by providing faculty too much information. “[The faculty] would rather trust me to make certain decisions and keep them informed without having to hear all the gory details about the process and all of that.” The dean’s instinct, however, is to “explain why I make the decisions I make.” “It's hard to be an administrator and not occasionally want to hide things, but my inclination is to discipline myself to be pretty open about things.”

### *Charting the College's Vision*

Over time, Dean Joyce has become more certain of the college’s mission – the college should become the best in its discipline. “We are on the verge of being clearly the best [college] in the country. I think we probably already are. I know a lot of people think that, but we definitely have a chance to really stand out as being superior.” He senses “very high consensus” and “enthusiasm” among faculty and staff around this “core mission.” “I've gotten very good feedback from the faculty ... I hear people repeating it and using it to frame things they say in meetings.” The senior team “managed to structure

[the mission] at an abstract enough level that it's pretty inclusive,” but without making it sound “completely vacuous.”

Despite this momentum, Dean Joyce acknowledges that some faculty have expressed a desire to “clarify” the college’s “pretty broad” mission of being the best in the country. “To [be the best] and if we want to be the best, we have to be the best. We have to figure out what it is we're the best out. That's a priority and I think we're making a lot of progress on that.” He senses that the time is ripe to develop a clearer plan for translating this vision into priorities. “We have to be pretty clear about where we want to invest faculty resources, what types of teaching programs we want to have and so forth. We've got to do better at that – and we're getting there.” The dean is decisive on this issue. “I don't tend to waffle or equivocate once I've reached [an opinion]. I take my time getting there, but I'm very comfortable executing when the time comes ... once I reach an opinion, I take a while to get there, but once I reach it, I can defend it.”

In particular, Dean Joyce wants to “build on the strength” of the college. With faculty hiring, for example, the college has begun to target recruits “who are better, on average, than who we are,” even if it exposes “our insecurities a little bit.” “We have an excellent faculty, but to jump to the next level, we have to actually improve.” With academic programs, the college is “broadening” its offerings into new undergraduate programs and “strengthening” its graduate programs. With graduate programs, the college needs to “diversify” and “build out” its programs to ensure that the college is not “just a one-trick pony,” which alludes to the college’s signature program. The new programs broaden the college’s offerings in “innovative” ways. Some of the new programs are “definitely leadership programs in the U.S., out in front.”

To “execute” this vision, Dean Joyce seeks the guidance and support of the faculty. He continues to identify with “that [faculty] perspective,” even as dean. The faculty retain “the most meaningful ownership of our intellectual objectives” – research and teaching. “I listen to and respect my faculty colleagues and really believe that the intellectual ownership or the primary responsibility for the success of a research university is through its faculty.” He confesses that some faculty colleagues “get [his] ear more” than others, especially those who want “to kick some ass and take names” and “to make a difference, but in a meaningful way.” This perspective reflects his own vision as a professor. The college’s “special niche” was stimulating “scientific achievement and contributions to knowledge that have short to medium term impact, that we can actually see how the world is improved by it.”

Along with the faculty, Dean Joyce considers the provost and other administrators in the provost’s office as key partners in advancing the college’s priorities. “Every interaction” with the provost “is a conversation about ‘what’s going on at the university? What are priorities? What’s going on at the college?’” Dean Joyce believes he has the provost’s confidence. The provost “keeps an eye on what I’m doing and asks me questions and challenges me,” adding, “The provost is not telling the college what to do, but I answer to the provost and I pay attention to that.” The college’s “very strong” financial situation makes for easier interactions with the provost. The dean credits his predecessor with balancing the college’s budget, which he has “maintained.” Under the previous dean, who was a “fiscal conservative,” the college accumulated a surplus, which the dean characterizes as “quite healthy, given the size of the college.”

Dean Joyce plans to invest this surplus in a series of “meaningful” academic initiatives. “It’s a fair bit of money to invest in getting some new things started.” The dean appreciates that these resources afford him a unique opportunity to “jumpstart” academic priorities. “I can’t throw money around and I don’t, probably because I’m fiscally conservative. But there’s some money that can be spent thoughtfully, which is not true for every college.” Over the past year, the senior team has met once a month to explore potential “strategic” investments for allocating the college’s surplus. Dean Joyce describes this approach as “very team-oriented” and “ongoing.” “We now have a sizable investment fund that we’ve accumulated and we’ve made some pretty bold plans about how the college should move forward. We’re now trying to operationalize that by assigning resources to particular things.”

### **Dean Stowe – The Synthesizer**

#### *Understating Presence as Dean*

Dean Stowe was not “looking” to become a dean, having no aspirations to “move up” as an academic administrator. Instead she was “happy” directing a research institute at a prominent public research university. “There wasn’t any reason to think about looking around.” Yet she remained open to “completely irresistible” opportunities at other institutions because she envisioned having only “one major chunk left in her career.” “I always have thought that academic life kind of comes in chunks, and the chunk is usually sort of six to eight years.”

With this perspective, Dean Stowe professes that a college should be much more than its dean. “None of us are irreplaceable – and that includes me.” Her experience as a

professor shaped this understated interpretation of the deanship. Before coming to Sprawling University, she was in a college that had been led by the same dean for nearly two decades. “For over half of the faculty, she was the only dean they’d ever known.” As a professor, Dean Stowe noticed how this dean was “fabulous in so many areas,” but “there were a few areas where the school didn’t move” for years.

The dean’s belief was further underscored by her initial experiences at Sprawling University. She replaced a “strong” and “very successful” dean who had “accomplished enormous things for the college,” including generating a budget surplus. “I think [the former dean] was careful, and that left me in a particularly strong position, which was fabulous.” Her predecessor, however, had wanted to serve another term, which the provost did not entertain. In response, the previous dean was not “heavily invested” in Dean Stowe’s transition. The previous dean, for example, walked away with numerous documents that would have assisted the dean’s orientation.

In part, Dean Stowe checks her “presence” as dean by continuing to conduct research and teach classes. “I don’t want the people around me to feel like it would be a bad thing for me to stop being dean at some point. There’s lots I can do,” adding, “I don’t want to feel that I can’t ever give this up and still be productive.” She fears that deans can lose their academic identity. “For long-standing deans, you can’t read deeply while you’re a dean. You can’t do active field research.” Faculty collaborators as well as graduate students can help, but prolonged absences from conducting research or teaching classes disconnects deans from their faculty roots. “If you go too long without doing those things, you kind of lose the edge.”

### *Structuring Faculty Creativity*

Despite her happiness as a research director, she found the open deanship at Sprawling University “intriguing” and “really exciting.” First, the college is among largest in her discipline across the country. Second, she respected the college’s “long institutional history of interdisciplinary work” because her own academic training and research agenda is multidisciplinary. Moreover, the college featured “a very strong faculty, a very strong research agenda, a vibrant program.” “I thought there was a lot of room to think through exactly that – how do you take this kind of [faculty] resource and really think through and develop what different next steps should be?” She realized, “I could give value here and I was sure that I would enjoy it,” after speaking with the provost at the time about the open deanship.

Not surprisingly, Dean Stowe describes her approach to shaping academic priorities as “committed but understated.” “You can’t just tell people ‘make something happen.’” Instead she characterizes the dean’s role as “jump starting the creative thought” of faculty, “so that they would have new and different ideas about how to move forward.” During the interview process, Dean Stowe began to realize her vision for shaping priorities. While “thinking about what is best for the college right now,” she concluded that imposing her own “particular vision” would not be “useful.” Instead she wanted to stimulate the faculty’s research, which “stretched in interesting ways across the whole spectrum” from basic research to assessment and evaluation. “How do you really make that work for you and your faculty and the college as a whole?”

The most visible embodiment of her approach to shaping priorities has been developing the college’s “centers of excellence.” The initiative aims to stimulate new

research and teaching projects that address specific problems in the discipline. The initiative leverages the strength of the college that initially caught the dean's attention – the breadth and depth of the faculty. “We are a large enough college to have nodes of strength around a number of topic areas.” Dean Stowe makes clear that the vitality of the centers of excellence depends on faculty to propose new projects. As dean, she wants the faculty to feel invested in the process of designing and implementing the centers. “To ask faculty, to give them the wherewithal to consolidate, to actually team up with advanced students, and to think really creatively about what's the next step forward in this area, and what role should our college be playing, and to make a proposal.”

Although Dean Stowe ascribes ownership of the projects to the faculty, she acknowledges her instrumental role in developing this initiative. The centers of excellence would not have existed without her efforts. “I think what I brought to the table is, I knew we had to do this, and I had a way to make it happen.” This “way” required “creating a framework” from which the faculty could organize their efforts. First, the dean introduced “enough structure” to define key parameters for the centers – engaging multiple faculty, engaging a range of students, conducting new research and articulating areas of future research. Second, she wanted the centers to embody core values shared among faculty, students and staff. “There are some deeply felt values in this college, which I have a lot of respect for.” The dean wanted the centers to promote social justice, emphasize outreach outside of academia and conduct research that “will make a difference.” While reviewing some of the initial proposals for centers, she returned submissions that did not reflect these values. “There were a couple that I did turn down,

where I said ... ‘One of the things was you had to know how you were going to work closely with a cohort of students, and I don't see the students here.’”

The dean’s framework for the centers, however, could not be so prescriptive that it “stifled” the faculty’s creativity. “You have to have enough of a ... framework so that people have a scaffolding to latch their ideas on to, without so many requirements that you almost are indicating it should be something that we've already done before.” By balancing structure and flexibility, the design “encapsulated” the college’s mission and the faculty’s diverse interests. “They are very different from each other structurally – the number of people involved, the kinds of activities they want to go forward, how they're wrestling with both the research and the teaching agenda in those areas.”

### *Synthesizing Priorities*

Although Dean Stowe has led several research institutes, she credits experiences with her church as most influencing her approach to shaping academic priorities. The dean attended a form of “management training” with her church, which is when she began to “like management.” Her training encouraged generating consensus – “a very different style” – that is “appropriate for a small, active, very good college.” “Within an academic setting, you don't necessarily aim at the sort of totality of the consensus, but you can come astonishingly close, I think, if you approach it with that set of skills ... thinking about what people have to bring to the table in those discussions.”

During meetings, Dean Stowe aims to capture or “plum” as many different perspectives as possible to generate consensus. This inclusive approach reflects her church’s belief that no individual “holds the whole truth.” Instead “everybody holds a



piece of the truth.” During faculty meetings, for example, the dean wants to “make sure every voice has been heard” and “make sure everybody’s had their say.” These meetings are important opportunities “to unearth ideas that have not been spoken yet.” She strives to protect this fertile space, arguing, “there has to be a time when any idea could come up.” She aims to “capture the meaning” of these discussions, describing her mental process as “trying to actually put ... pieces together.” “My role is to try to synthesize out what I'm hearing, something that captures ... the truth.” She hopes to discover novel ideas while synthesizing contributions into an emerging consensus. “[Someone] said something new – is that something that we could kind of just add on to [my synthesis]? Or is it really a transformation and we have to think about this whole thing differently?”

Among its benefits, Dean Stowe believes this approach curtails dissension. The dean cites her most recent annual faculty meeting about the college’s budget as an example. In this meeting, most faculty insisted on conducting numerous faculty searches during the same year rather than staggering them over several years. “I don't think we ever had any quarrels about the nature of the search after we were done.” She credits this sense of agreement to a belief among faculty that they had a chance to express their ideas. “One thing that was really clear, even for people who just thought it took too long and why didn't I cut to the chase, is nobody thought there hadn't been an opportunity to speak.” This experience affirmed the dean’s commitment to discussing the college’s budget with the faculty in an open forum. “To do that, to do it around the budget, it just takes time, but I think you save time later on because you're less likely to get really bogged down.”

Dean Stowe, however, acknowledges that her “very understated” persona also presents pitfalls. Her approach can be interpreted as indifference or ineptitude. “It is easy for faculty who are driven to see understated as weak.” Some faculty find her style “difficult” because they expect the dean to command discussions. “Other leaders that I serve with and work with are more likely to leap in ... and have more to say as they see people floundering. I’m more likely to let it flounder for a while and see if something that I haven’t heard yet comes out.” From her church training, Dean Stowe resists interjecting, even if some faculty find her silence to be “unnerving.” She also resists the “reflex” to say, “no, we’re not going there” when “a lone, loud voice” draws discussion “off course.”

In retrospect, Dean Stowe now believes there was a mutual “learning curve” during her first year as dean. She was learning the faculty’s perspective, while the faculty was becoming accustomed to her understated style. The dean was surprised that faculty and staff found her quieter approach to be so different. “There was almost a year of people just being surprised. I was being understated, but they still weren’t getting their way. It didn’t mean I said ‘yes.’” From her church training, the dean learned that “you don’t have to get mad to say ‘no.’” She elaborates, saying, “I’m always willing to hear an argument. I’m not willing, necessarily, to change my mind because I’ve heard it.”

### *Dispelling Myth of Poverty*

After several annual budget reviews, Dean Stowe surmised that her predecessor had not discussed the college’s budget with faculty and staff. An associate dean recalls the previous dean harping fiscal prudence, which most faculty perceived as a necessity. “I always thought we were poverty-stricken as a faculty member. It was always like, ‘Oh,

we can't afford that or this.'" Dean Stowe believes the faculty thought the college was "running right at the edge" of bankruptcy upon her arrival. "People would say, 'do you think we could do this, do you think we could do that?'"

In contrast to these bleak perceptions, Dean Stowe soon realized that the college actually held a sizable surplus. "My sense was, when I looked at the overall figures that the college was in very solid shape, which it was." Her predecessor was "very conservative" with finances and "very thoughtful about expenses." The finance director echoes this depiction, remembering the previous dean's fiscal mantras as "keep cutting" and "be conservative." Moreover, the previous dean leveraged her "charisma" to secure millions of dollars from the provost's office for academic programs, which were then "buried" in the college's "backyard" rather than spent on academic programs. Dean Stowe admits that the college has a "somewhat fat" surplus. An associate dean recalls the shock of learning of the college's real budget situation upon Dean Stowe's arrival. "We almost all fell off our chairs because we were not in the red. [The previous dean] had substantially, I mean, saved a substantial amount of money."

After completing several budget reviews – "it took years to uncover" – Dean Stowe concluded that the previous dean had crafted a myth of poverty within the college. To sustain this narrative, her predecessor adopted "a very individualistic" approach to budgets; other than her and the finance director, no other individual had access to fiscal data. By constricting this information, the previous dean could continue scaring faculty and staff into believing that the college was poor, which allowed her to further curtail expenditures. "I think she was more closed with information about the budget ... Faculty

didn't know there were resources.” An associate dean explains that none of the faculty knew there was “cash” to invest.

In response, Dean Stowe has tried to increase fiscal transparency throughout the college. “I hope they know [more] now. At least, if they don't know it now, it's not for want of my trying.” Most notably, Dean Stowe discusses the college’s budget with the faculty every spring after meeting with the provost for the budget conference. “I present the overall budget, my sense of the status of the college, what we spent money on, where we're going and over the next five years, we're going to face some budget challenges.” She has discussed the budget with the faculty every year, apart from her first two years as dean; at that point, she was still “so confused” about the university’s budget model and the college’s budget situation. One associate dean believes that the dean began discussing the budget with faculty once she “felt comfortable” and “could explain it to people.”

### **Dean Swift – The Orchestrator**

#### *“Cooking Up” Ideas*

Dean Swift is clear: “I don't decide priorities; I orchestrate them.” He is also no “fan” of strategic planning. “I don't want to sit around and debate mission statements and vision statements. If you find one you like from MIT or whatever, let's just copy it. I don't care. It doesn't make any difference to me.” This judgment reflects his experience; as dean, he has advised numerous universities, which often includes reviewing strategic plans. “I've been to meetings with organizations where, let's spend a few days fine tuning the wording of a mission statement or a vision statement or something. My reaction to that is ‘just shoot me now,’ because I do not have time for this.”

Instead of crafting “grandiose hyperbole,” Dean Swift focuses on stimulating new ideas that improve the college. “What's important to me is generating new ideas, the quality of the ideas, then organizing those ideas, and then most important, carrying the things out ... the ultimate value is in coming up with a list of things you're really going to do.” Admittedly, the dean is “probably too impatient to be able to tolerate” a “full-blown, drawn-out” strategic planning process. “I want to get to the answer and get going.” In fact, the college has not drafted a “conventional” strategic plan during his tenure. Instead the college’s senior team opted to draft a list of “strategic priorities.” “Let's focus on some key initiatives, some of which might be pretty radical, pretty fundamentally new, and let's put those into play.”

With this emphasis on action, Dean Swift shapes academic priorities by stimulating a “fluid” stream of constant “brainstorming” across the college. “My associate deans would probably agree with this, that the way we run the operation here is we spend hours and hours brainstorming.” This brainstorming often “happens informally” and “organically.” “The planning ... doesn't occur in what I'd call a very highly organized way,” adding, “there isn't any big, comprehensive planning process.” Instead Dean Swift encourages a flow of brainstorming that transpires everywhere in the college – the dean’s conference room and in lobbies and hallways. “We ... keep our eyes and ears open to spot opportunities that are still at a very nascent, early stage.”

Dean Swift emphasizes that the college’s senior team, which includes the associate deans and administrative directors, assumes a central role in this brainstorming process. “My associate deans, they tend to work with me as a team. They'll often spot something and say, ‘Hey, we ought to do this. Take a look at this’ and then we'll think it

through together.” With a blend of evangelical zeal and childlike wonder, Dean Swift espouses the “wisdom of crowds,” stressing that it “takes a collection of people” to “make the best decisions on behalf of the institution.” “There really isn't much of anything that happens around here just because I or one person thinks it's a good idea. It's usually several people, all of whom I respect a great deal, that agree, ‘Wow, look what this could become!’” During meetings, the senior team not only identifies new ideas, but also scrutinizes and refines ideas. “We're hatching stuff and then if we've got ideas, we run those by the rest of the [team], the department chairs and what have you.”

The dean's penchant for action, however, should not be confused as an impetuous character. “Most faculty members, and I certainly fall in this camp, are contemplative types who like to think of every angle, making the best decision.” Dean Swift admits to reveling in these calculating tendencies. “I'm certainly a person who understands pretty quickly how organizations work and how, when you pull on one end of the spaghetti, something else moves somewhere else, and the thinking through of implications.” He punctuates this point, saying, “I'm a person who's maybe a little more likely to play chess than checkers, where different kind of pieces, they operate in different ways, and you really have to think ahead many moves to understand what the implication of a decision will be.” It was as a department chair that Dean Swift learned “how to make lots and lots of decisions in short periods of time” and knowing when to “just pull the trigger.” “Hey, I can't study this to death. I don't have time. We got to get on with it.”

### *Creating Forums for Brainstorming*

To stimulate brainstorming, Dean Swift meets with administrators throughout the college to tap into their creativity and expertise. These meetings assume three different forms: meeting with the associate deans and administrative directors once a week; meeting with the department chairs and associate deans every other week; and meeting with just the associate deans once a month. “Lots of new ideas” are discussed during these meetings. “We bounce ideas off ... in terms of where we think we might go or what we've been talking about.” In fact, the monthly meeting with the associate deans is designed as a brainstorming session. “Some of the associate dean meetings, we actually just show up and there's not even one item on the agenda. We just say, ‘okay guys, what are you thinking about?’ And we just start cooking and just see what happens.”

Dean Swift engages department chairs in a similar way. He does not want them to feel like he is their boss. “I'm not on the phone telling ... my department chairs what to do. I just don't do it that way at all.” One associate dean characterizes the meeting with the chairs as “a little more directed” than those with the senior team – the dean often invites external presenters to the meetings and structures meetings to “solicit feedback” or “take the temperature” on important issues – but discussion still affords space for chairs to “raise” any issues. Moreover, Dean Swift encourages the chairs and associate deans to work together. “We hire the very best people we can and then we let them do their jobs ... there's no sense in which a department chair reports to an associate dean. I hope that they feel like they're really equals and they're all just trying to make this a better place.” The dean mentions a recent research initiative, which can be traced back to the associate deans and department chairs brainstorming together. “We'll talk with

department chairs and say, ‘geez, it would be a really good idea if we were to hire some more faculty here or faculty with this capability or that capability.’”

After assuming office, Dean Swift perceived a need to convince individuals across the college that he really intended to lead the college in this collaborative fashion. “People realized pretty quickly that the whole style of the place was going to change.” The former dean espoused a different approach, opting to design and direct initiatives by himself. In fact, some associate deans “were treading a little too carefully” after his appointment, but they “picked up” on the dean’s style; they began to realize that “there’s a new sheriff in town.” “At some point they started saying, ‘Hey, this is nuts’ ... understanding that everybody’s free to speak their mind. Just be polite; try not to hurt too many feelings. But we can’t run the place unless we put all our brains together.”

### *Imagining the Future*

Dean Swift espouses a specific meaning of “vision” to stimulate brainstorming across the college. “I think to do it this way requires some amount of vision, but I don’t want to use vision in quite the typical way. People think, ‘Oh, the leader’s got vision, it means that somehow they can predict the whole future or something.’ It’s not like that.” Instead he defines vision as “stretching” the “imagination” of administrators, faculty, staff and students. The dean encourages other individuals to “see how the world could be different” for the college – and even for the university and their discipline. “Vision means for any particular initiative you’ve got in mind being able to see how the world could be different. It’s like ‘If we do this, I can see where that will get us in two years. I can see how this place will be fundamentally different if we undertake this initiative.’” Again, he



articulates a preference for thinking in terms of priorities over strategic plans. “Let's think of some stuff . . . let's come up with a list of things we can really execute on. Then even just a couple years later we say, ‘yes we did this, we did this, we did this.’”

Through brainstorming, Dean Swift and the senior team refine and translate their nascent ideas into actionable blueprints. The dean explains,

They can describe that point in the sky that we need to get to. They can describe it and then together, once we decide where it is in the sky and what it is that might help us get there, then we go into the detailed planning, the tactics. ‘Okay, how do we implement this thing? What's step one, step two? What's the schedule or the deadlines?’ Then we might be more organized about getting it done.

The dean characterizes this type of imagination – “to imagine things that don’t exist” and “imagine what the future could be” – as typical of their discipline. “We think a lot about, ‘okay, this is how things are today. On the other hand, this is how they could be.’”

Dean Swift and the senior team generate plenty of ideas, but the dean acknowledges, “we don’t assume we have all of the good ideas.” He engages many groups inside and outside of the university for ideas. Outside of the university, the dean solicits ideas from alumni, employers and donors. Inside the university, Dean Swift counts the provost as a partner for “cooking” ideas. He regularly meets with the provost, being one of the “big kids” on campus. “It's partly because I'm in a bigger college and partly because [the college] plays a strong role on this campus. I just see the provost and president all of the time,” adding, “the provost . . . is generally better acquainted with the larger colleges because you’ve got a lot more eggs in those baskets.” The provost, however, does not assume a “strong role” in shaping the college’s priorities. “I think the provost's role is really important, but the provost doesn't really dictate priorities for the college.” Instead the provost’s role has more to do with “managing problems” and

“supporting good ideas.” During his tenure, the university’s provosts have been “pretty good at brainstorming” and “pretty supportive when they see good ideas bubbling up.”

### *Modeling Early Lessons*

Dean Swift traces his collaborative approach as dean to “a lot” of “informal mentoring” as an assistant professor. “I would say that the culture that I witnessed and was part of [at his former institution] turned out to be, that’s what I wanted to create here.” He smiles, recalling “just spectacular ... very helpful” and “super smart” colleagues. The dean characterizes his former department as a “big gang,” emphasizing, “everybody was ... all working in the same direction.” “Literally, every single day,” for example, he ate lunch with a group of fifteen faculty colleagues, including “world class, world leading” faculty; after several years, the dean “felt like [he] knew all of the most famous people in their different disciplines.” He remembers his senior colleagues assuring him that his “voice counted” even as “the new kid on the block.”

These interactions engendered “a community atmosphere,” offering a framework for “how to go about your business at a top-notch place.” It was a “very, very collegial place” and “very participatory.” He underscores the enduring effect of these experiences on his perspective. “It was not a set of individuals. It was really a set of people that were working together and pulling for each other and helping each other. I think that my experiences there with that set of faculty members very much shaped my view of academia and how things ought to be run.” He sensed some version of this culture upon becoming dean, even if the college “still had some work to do.” But the college now feels more like the atmosphere he hoped to create. “If you were to go around and talk to the

department chairs and talk to most faculty, they feel like they have a voice. They feel like they're part of something bigger.” He pauses and then adds, “They feel, I hope, that this is the place where they can do their best work.”

At his former institution, Dean Swift also learned how to work with difficult faculty colleagues. The dean hints that he does not “have a big ego” nor feels “easily intimidated” by colleagues who do. He attributes these tendencies to his “personality,” but also believes his early faculty experiences solidified his approach. “Part of the lack of intimidation I think comes from my time at [peer institution] where I had really powerful colleagues and we had Nobel Prize winners coming through the place ... I had rubbed shoulders with the most luminous of luminaries.” It was in this environment that he realized “it would be hard to lead people if you’re just always in awe of them.”

With this perspective, Dean Swift does not fret over difficult colleagues. “I’m comfortable dealing with people who do have big egos and just kind of letting them do their thing. I sit back and kind of chuckle inside and say, ‘Okay, they’re filling their role. Now I’ve got to fill my role.’” He relies on this perspective as dean, saying,

I think that’s important because every big powerful department has some very aggressive people in it and, if you’re going to get heartburn every time they come and pound on your door and want something or feel like you’ve made a poor decision, then any kind of administrative job would just be so challenging and so unpleasant.

Instead Dean Swift expects that some faculty will always disagree with some of his decisions. “If you can say, ‘they’re doing their job. They’re annoyed. I was expecting they’d be annoyed. I’m going to do my job. I’m going to make the best decision on behalf of the department or the college or the institution.’”

In addition to his faculty experiences, Dean Swift identifies an unlikely personal relationship as inspiring this approach. He credits a friendship during college as fostering patience for different types of colleagues, which he acknowledges “may seem kind of odd.” The dean came from a “calm” and “well-behaved” family, but he was assigned a “rough and tumble kid” as a roommate. “All of his friends called him the 'Little General' because he really did kind of order people around and make pretty caustic comments.” He recalls that his roommate and all of his hometown friends “just *beat* each other up” during conversations. Despite their differences in style, Dean Swift became friends with his roommate, choosing to share an off-campus apartment together after their stint in the dormitory. From this experience, Dean Swift learned the value of accepting and co-existing with different types of people, which shaped his eventual style as a department chair and dean. “So, when I'm here at Sprawling, I occasionally will see a personality like that and, instead of being irritated or upset, I actually enjoy it. It's part of the diversity of the human species. It's pretty cool.”

### *Leveraging the Audition*

Dean Swift describes his path to the deanship as “an accident.” He did not give “any thought to entering the dean race,” after his predecessor announced his departure. “It was like ‘Why mess up my life?’ I was having a great time as a department chair and was pretty close to students, very close to the faculty and we were making a lot of changes and a lot of things I thought were going in a positive direction.” He was “happy as a clam.” Dean Swift also appreciated the stress of the search process. “When you enter the sweepstakes” for senior positions, “you don't just do it halfheartedly.”

But several colleagues, including a fellow department chair, persuaded him to apply for the deanship. “Some influential colleagues pushed me and twisted my arm.” The dean applied for the position “kind of at the last moment.” Despite his initial hesitation, Dean Swift framed the interview process as an opportunity to formulate his vision for the college. “What happened was, as I was thinking about it toward the end, right before I applied, I thought about what I would do as dean and I constructed a letter that had a lot of thoughts in it.” The experience of writing this letter energized – and focused – the dean. “Once I’d written the letter, I got more excited about the position because then I’d kind of thought through what could be done, thought through how I might fit and I decided once I sent the letter in, then it was sort of ‘all in’ in the process.”

Similarly, the interview process deepened the dean’s commitment. The process included a public presentation in which candidates were asked to outline their visions for the college. “I thought a while about what kind of seminar I would give because I didn’t want to just sort of tell people how it would be if I were dean or tell them, ‘This is the program. Get with the program.’” Instead he used this forum to explore the extent to which there was a “reasonable match” between himself and the position. He emphasized a need to select a dean who could address the college’s needs for that point in time. “What I did was outline a number of things that I would want to pursue, if I were dean. Then I told the faculty in attendance that, ‘If this resonates with you. I may be a very reasonable candidate for the position. But, if it doesn’t resonate with you, then I’m the wrong person.’” He articulated his vision, but did not “force anything on anybody.” “I tried to describe myself and what some of my priorities would be as dean. I told people that if they weren’t keen on those priorities, then they simply shouldn’t select me as dean

because if I was dean, that stuff was going to happen.” Ultimately, his presentation became his agenda as dean. “I did lay out pretty much exactly what I wanted to do.”

### **Dean Huxley – The Survivor**

#### *Inheriting Deficit*

Dean Huxley was no stranger to academic administration before coming to Sprawling University. He had served as an administrator inside and outside of academia, including tenure as a dean at several research universities. When approached about the open deanship, Dean Huxley immediately grasped Sprawling’s “distinctive” appeal. First, the college was one of the highest ranked programs in the country. Second, Sprawling was a “great” institution that promised broad academic excellence. In his discipline, strong colleges are rarely at universities that boast ranked programs across many disciplines. “The real mission for [the discipline] – developing its place in society and its perceived value by the rest of society is something that can get worked out in the context of a culture like Sprawling University’s in a very exciting way.” With the institution’s “quality and richness,” he envisioned a chance to design new educational and research programs that spanned disciplinary boundaries. “One of the things I really came to Sprawling for were the interdisciplinary opportunities, the opportunities beyond the unit.”

Despite these aspirations, Dean Huxley has spent most of his tenure preoccupied with fixing the college’s budget. “It’s ... poignant to be reminded of the level of aspirations I came in with and then had to temper.” He has achieved some of his vision for the college, but the dean had to delay many of his plans due to fiscal problems. “We certainly [pursued interdisciplinary opportunities] to the extent that we could, but the

resource situation was very, very constrained.” The finance director describes the dean's vision for the college as being "squashed" by fiscal realities. "[The dean] has a vision. He's not been able to implement that vision well because of our financial situation.”

These complications, however, were not obvious during Dean Huxley's courtship. During the search process, the provost's office provided him with numerous documents about the college and university. But the college's looming problems were not “evident” in the materials. Due to the institution's “distinctive way of budgeting,” it was difficult to interpret figures “in a way that could have provided that kind of window” to an outsider. At previous universities, the dean operated in centralized budget models. “It was a much more paternalistic structure. [Peer institution] is a much more typical state university, less distributed model in which the budget management happened in a much more central way.” The dean “had learned a great deal about budgets” from earlier experiences, but these lessons did not prepare him for the university's “peculiar budget” or unique “degree of unit autonomy.” He confesses that it took time to adjust to the university's decentralized structure. “It was a learning curve for me – and a mean one.”

Dean Huxley recalls numerous fiscal surprises during his first year, which were harbingers of crises to come. In one case, he learned that the college needed to raise millions of dollars to finish a building that had been built during his predecessor's tenure. The sitting provost forgave the remaining debt “in recognition that it was ... something that ought to have been recognized upfront.” But the episode distracted the dean from his academic agenda, which was “emblematic of the degree of surprise that awaited.” Dean Huxley came to realize that he had “inherited” a “very, very weak” budget. In fact, the college did not really have a budget. The college's small administrative and finance staff

was “running the college as sort of a year-to-year, mom-and-pop operation,” which meant, “problems tended to compound themselves.”

The college’s precarious fiscal position prompted the dean’s predecessor to balance the budget in ways that “were not good for the college.” The former dean, for example, increased revenues by increasing enrollment, but this maneuver increased demand for financial aid, which was a scarce resource in the college. Without raising flags in the college or the provost’s office, the former dean “dumped” a “significant amount” of endowment income for scholarships into financial aid for incoming students during his last year. Dean Huxley suspects his predecessor was leveraging this aid to lure top applicants. “You recruit a class of students like ours ... with a lot of financial aid” because competition for top students involves only several elite institutions that “all spend huge amounts of financial aid.”

This “windfall” should have been a one-time expenditure, but the college offered similar amounts of financial aid to incoming students during Dean Huxley’s first and second years. These expenditures were “significantly beyond” the college’s “actual means” because these subsequent outlays were not funded with endowment income. The “bubble” revealed itself during the dean’s second budget conference with the provost. Dean Huxley recalls the moment when it became clear that the college was in deficit; no one had “realized what had happened” until the dean and the provost began discussing enrollment projections. There was an “extraordinary, anomalous increase” in financial aid that “nobody was quite looking for” in the budget. “The financial aid expenditures that happened before I got here, and then the compounding before anybody knew what was going on, really dug us into a fairly substantial negative posture.”



### *Digging Out of Deficit*

Most of Dean Huxley's tenure, therefore, has been "spent trying to dig out from this fiscal problem." To address the deficit, the dean instituted sustained "severe austerity measures." The college, for example, limited its financial aid to incoming students, delayed academic initiatives and constricted its salary program. An associate dean argues that the dean "did everything he could to get us on some solid footing," adopting "all the measures that he had to." Moreover, Dean Huxley felt "under the gun from the provost's office" because discovery of the deficit eroded the provost's office's confidence in the college. In response, the dean worked to improve "systems of accountability, analysis and management" throughout the college.

Dean Huxley bemoans that "it took years" to fix these fiscal problems. He acknowledges that stress over the budget has taken its toll on the college. "We've been dragged down ... I do think that the fiscal realities have had that effect on us." To help ease some of the burden, the provost's office "stepped up to the plate," providing emergency funding and agreeing to higher differential tuition rates as "necessary measures." The dean regrets having to "constrain financial aid," which decreased access for some students. The fiscal stress has also taken its toll on Dean Huxley; he reveals his frustration at times. "Basically, [financial aid] had to be very constrained and salary programs and initiatives blah blah blah ... That really accounts for [most] of my time here, trying to rectify that situation."

Members of the college's senior team relate the dean's frustration. The finance director concedes, "there's almost no point in talking about a vision if you've got no way of implementing it." "If from year to year, disaster to disaster happens, why talk about all

these far-reaching things that you would like to do?" This administrator knows the dean "wishes that he would have had the resources to be able to be a leader." The college leads "in certain things" in the discipline, but Dean Huxley often points to other universities and says, "Why aren't we doing that?" "Other colleges [in the discipline] have done these things. Oh, we need to do them.' It's a refrain I hear a lot." This "reactive" approach differentiates the college from other colleges on campus – and not in an enviable way. "It would be more like the university in general to have been the ones to think of those things and implement those things first," but the dean "was never able to do that."

Despite frustration over his stalled agenda, the dean's austerity measures have worked – the college has emerged from deficit. Dean Huxley articulates a sense of cautious triumph, describing the college as "stable for the first time" in over a decade. "We're not skating on such thin ice that in any given year, we could by virtue ... anomalies in enrollment or financial aid or something in which we could break through the ice." One associate dean portrays the improved financial situation as a "huge morale boost" across the college. The dean expresses relief, reiterating this point numerous times. "We've stabilized the budget enough so that we're at least staying above the line." With this increased stability, Dean Huxley feels comfortable celebrating the college's "incremental" accomplishments during his tenure – increasing global outreach, constructing a new building and creating a new interdisciplinary academic program. "Not to say that we haven't launched a bunch of initiatives that I think have been valuable ... I'm happy about those things." He expresses pride in these achievements, but admits that the college has "been in a holding pattern" for most of his tenure. "I don't feel that we've had the room, the stability really to be able to look into the future and be really strategic."

With the college in stronger financial shape, Dean Huxley has begun to shift the college's focus from survival to revival. "I'm really, really intent on trying to move our discourse at the college above the survival mode that we've been in. It's been a very defensive sort of survival mode, really, in many ways since I got here." Instead the dean wants to "rise above" fiscal anxieties. "My hope is that we can make progress in moving beyond that sort of looking over our shoulder all the time and start identifying some major directions; and then if we're fortunate and successful, we'll find the means, time and energy to be able to move those agendas forward." He has already identified some of these initiatives, including a curricular project. "There are really promising and exciting things going on at the college ... opportunities to move in very important directions that we really haven't been able to realize and now I think are able to."

### *Navigating Revenue Uncertainty*

Despite the college's improved budget situation, Dean Huxley continues to worry about its fiscal future. "The balance of cost and revenue is just very, very, very close." The provost's office subsidizes the college with the Addendum, but the dean describes these resources as insufficient. "To the extent there's wiggle room, the institution I think has really stepped up to the plate to subsidize the college. It happens that it doesn't feel like it's sufficient enough for us to remain excellent and stay above the margin." The Campus Budget model remains "strongly tilted towards a market conception," but the college generates little revenue from sponsored research because the faculty does not conduct research that attracts large, multi-year grants. "[Other colleges] have access to

external resources and it's just a very different fiscal situation." The finance director stresses this point, arguing, "if you're trying to attract funding, we're not sexy."

The college, therefore, depends on the provost's office for survival. "We're ... heavily dependent on general funds ... like it or not." Dean Huxley worries that this dependence leaves the college "in a very vulnerable position over time" because its viability depends on the provost's preferences. "[This dependence] tends to raise the stakes such that if the central power of the institution believes in the importance of [the discipline], then we probably benefit. If they don't, we're at even greater risk." The dean does not believe the college can escape this conundrum; it will never be like other colleges "that really are operating on their own bottom, tubs on their own bottoms." With few opportunities to attract grants, the college finds itself in a more challenging fiscal situation than other colleges. "When you're in that position, to try to be entrepreneurial in the manner of an engineer who has a lot of resources is very difficult. It's a challenge."

This vulnerability feels more acute due to the college's accompanying dependence on tuition. The college has become "very enrolled" and "very tuition dependent," which increases the importance of the university's tuition policy on the college's fiscal fate. An associate dean describes this anxiety, arguing that enrollment projections "have a huge impact whether we are above or below water." The prospect of a small – or worse yet, no – increase in tuition makes budgeting "a lot harder" for the college due to lack of reserves, according to the finance director. "Where it's an issue for us, I think more than other [colleges], is that we recently came out of that huge budget decline ... we're stable, but any decline below the budget planning assumptions will hurt us." Dean Huxley confesses that his college's budget position "could change

dramatically” if the Board of Trustees chooses to freeze tuition rates in future years, rejecting even a small increase in tuition and fees.

### *Espousing Collaboration*

Despite his extensive administrative experience, Dean Huxley quickly “confesses” that he is not cut out of managerial cloth. For starters, he is “not that good at sound bites” and “feeding ... quick answers” to questions. As a dean, this proclivity has been a “frustrating liability.” Moreover, the dean does not “hew” to “hierarchical, highly directive kinds of structure.” Instead Dean Huxley prefers to engage many individuals to analyze problems from different perspectives. “I’m temperamentally way more inclined to see all the different sides of an issue.” He senses that his instincts contradict the conventional wisdom presented in popular management books, which he critiques as “opaque” and “sort of depressing.” Instead the dean prefers more “iconoclastic” and paradoxical perspectives on leadership such as Richard Farson’s *Management of the Absurd*, which reflect his experiences as an academic administrator.

With this preference, Dean Huxley favors “democratic” models of leadership over “hierarchical authority.” Instead of dictating a vision for the college, Dean Huxley is “much more interested” in promoting a combination of “collaboration and individual responsibility.” In describing his “leadership style,” Dean Huxley compares himself to a musician in a chamber rather than the conductor of a symphony. “What I love is chamber music, which is the form in which every person is responsible for their own contribution to a greater good – a result. You’re not dependent really on a leader or an authority.

Everybody plays sort of an equal role.” In contrast, the dean avoids assuming the conductor’s role, which he considers “very directive.”

Dean Huxley emphasizes the role that the college’s senior team assumes in shaping academic priorities. Most associate deans and assistant deans are “just steeped in” advancing the college’s priorities and “very engaged in high-level consideration of strategic issues.” “That group is pretty actively involved in taking up strategic issues on an ongoing basis.” The finance director describes the dean as “very sensitive” to seeking input from the senior team while charting the college’s priorities. “[He] has ideas, and as the dean of the college he would, but he's, I don't want to say loathe to, but he's cautious about implementing his vision without getting other people's comments and buy in.”

With his “humanist” inclination, Dean Huxley aims to “cultivate” collaboration “as much as possible” to shape priorities. As dean, he wants to “simulate” interest in ideas once they have been “identified” inside and outside the college. Even amidst fiscal anxieties, he managed to advance several key priorities in the college, including creating and implementing an interdisciplinary program. “Fortunately, I think it's worked on the whole pretty well ... I'm excited about things that we've accomplished.” He identifies a nascent research program as an example of a project that “took years” to develop within the college, “but is really paying off in many, many ways.” For Dean Huxley, collaboration not only means stimulating initiatives in the college, but also working with other deans across campus to craft educational and research programs that “transcend” disciplinary “siloes.”

Despite these successes, Dean Huxley acknowledges that progress with some initiatives has been slow. “This is a big and complex college given the range of activity

that we're involved in, so you can't rely on collaboration to carry things forward all the time.” In particular, the dean realizes that his approach only inspires modest change when initiatives require individuals to alter their behavior. He references proposed curricular and pedagogical changes in the college as illustrations. “There are pieces, like I finally got the [curriculum change] going, we've made some progress in [another curriculum change], so there's stuff happening, but it hasn't gotten where I wanted.”

Dean Huxley concedes that his approach is not “powerful” or “efficient” enough for some faculty. It “doesn't always produce the most ... direct results.” Some faculty want him to assume a more commanding presence. “I fully acknowledge that there are people, including a lot of people in our discipline ... who really are much more comfortable with a more authoritarian, directive kind of style of management.” He respects these critiques more than resents them. “I really am deeply committed personally to the idea that the humanistic values of a democratic process really trump those other considerations. It's one of the reasons that I feel not tremendously disturbed by criticism from people who don't love the way I do things. I get it.”

### **Chapter Discussion**

In this chapter, I have explored how six profiled academic deans at Sprawling University conceptualize their role in shaping the academic priorities of their colleges. The profiled deans each claim an impressive array of academic credentials, records of research and scholarship and administrative experiences. Before becoming deans, they collectively served as deans at peer universities, department chairs at Sprawling University and peer institutions, associate deans at the university and peer institutions and

directors of institutes at peer institutions. These experiences, along with other professional and personal considerations, inform how they conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities as deans, which I summarize below.

### **Conceptualizing How to Shape Academic Priorities**

#### *Affirming Faculty Identities*

In large measure, the profiled academic deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities by affirming their identities as faculty. The deans have amassed considerable experience as administrators, but they remain professors at heart. Most of the profiled deans describe accidental paths into administration; their career plans did not include ascending into the dean's suite. Dean Austen and Dean Joyce are surprised to have assumed any administrative positions, let alone to have become deans. Dean Swift was "happy as a clam" as a department chair before applying for the deanship. Dean Stowe was quite satisfied as a research director, even if she was willing to entertain the right opportunity to become a dean. Despite extensive administrative experience, Dean Huxley remains uneasy with hierarchal authority, preferring collaborative models of leadership. In this respect, Dean Conrad is an outlier among this group; early in his academic career, he aspired to be an administrator. Dean Conrad draws confidence as dean from his reputation as a prominent scholar.

The faculty identities of the profiled deans affect how they shape academic priorities in important ways. First, they all espouse a commitment to collaboration and consultation while shaping priorities as deans. In particular, the deans stress the need to seek input from faculty and senior administrators in their colleges. Dean Conrad entrusts



the college's faculty with ownership of academic priorities, preferring not to impose his preferences beyond articulating an overarching vision. Dean Joyce solicits the faculty's perspective, ascribing them intellectual ownership of the college's priorities. Dean Stowe envisions her role in shaping priorities as creating a framework that can stimulate the faculty's creativity rather than forcing her own specific vision on the faculty. Dean Huxley promotes collaboration across the college, including stimulating nascent faculty initiatives. To design initiatives, Dean Swift tries to create forums that help to stimulate a constant stream of brainstorming with senior administrators and department chairs, while soliciting other faculty perspectives. To energize faculty participation, Dean Austen assembled summer taskforces to solicit feedback from the faculty on the college's future rather than imposing her vision for the college. The signature approaches of deans to shaping priorities, including instigating, extracting, synthesizing and orchestrating, all embody a commitment to engaging faculty and other administrators in their colleges.

This commitment to consultation and collaboration underscores a prominent role for faculty in shaping priorities, which further reinforces the faculty identity of deans. The profiled deans sound a recurrent theme: top-down approaches to shaping priorities do not work. Dean Conrad believes that micromanaging the faculty – telling them what to do and how to do it – rouses their resentment and spells failure for deans. Instead he espouses a more consultative approach of open dialogue. Dean Joyce and Dean Stowe profess the limits of their authority, dispelling any notion that they can dispense orders to faculty and administrators. Dean Swift contrasts his collaborative approach with the command-and-control style of his predecessor, emphasizing that a dean does not dictate the college's priorities. To energize faculty participation, Dean Austen solicited feedback

from the faculty on the college's future rather than imposing her vision for the college, even amidst fiscal exigency. Dean Huxley feels a deep commitment to collaborating with faculty and academic administrators, even if it means that some initiatives take longer to develop and implement – or even fail to come to fruition, period.

The academic and disciplinary training also affects how some of the deans shape academic priorities. Due to her academic training, Dean Austen possesses a unique set of technical skills and theoretical knowledge that helped her understand the university's budget model in hopes of fixing the college's deficit and addressing tensions with the college's culture. Similarly, Dean Joyce's academic training cultivated technical skills that help him understand fiscal issues and analyze quantitative data. In part, Dean Swift traces his penchant for brainstorming and imagining the future to the core values of his discipline. Even after serving as a dean at multiple research universities, Dean Huxley continues to champion an ethos of mutual responsibility more than hierarchical authority because his training was grounded in an egalitarian approach to academic work.

### *Validating Professional Experiences in Academe*

The profiled deans tend to espouse specific approaches to shaping academic priorities that validate their own professional experiences as professors. Dean Conrad asserts that the provost expects colleges to improve their research reputations because this focus on research validates his own success as a scholar. Within the college, he privileges the voices of top researchers on the faculty who profess scientific leadership, which was his own ambition as a professor. Dean Conrad also looks to the department chairs to execute his academic vision for the college, which reflects his own experience as a

department chair in the college before becoming dean. Similarly, Dean Joyce privileges the perspective of faculty who are making a difference in the world through their research because that was his orientation as a professor. Dean Swift traces his preference for brainstorming and “cooking up” ideas to the collaborative environment of his former department. He envisions the college as a collegial gang because this model embodies his formative experience as an assistant professor, which offers a stark contrast to the style of his predecessor. Dean Stowe attributes her understated style to working for and then succeeding longtime deans who had become inextricably linked to their colleges.

### *Affirming Personal Biographies*

A broader set of personal experiences beyond faculty experiences and academic training also affect how some of deans shape academic priorities. For some deans, making sense of academic priorities entails affirming aspects of their personal biographies. Most notably, Dean Stowe aims to live the values of her faith. With faculty, she tries to facilitate some form of consensus by capturing a diverse set of voices and patching together a version of “the truth.” This belief further stimulates her consultative approach as dean. More idiosyncratically, Dean Swift recounts the enduring imprint of a college roommate while describing his tolerance for conflict as a dean. By learning to live with a sarcastic roommate, and even becoming close friends with him, Dean Swift came to appreciate the virtue of tolerating different perspectives, which has informed his leadership style as a department chair and dean.

For other deans, an ethos of service thrust them into leadership positions, despite harboring no aspirations to becoming academic administrators. Dean Joyce and Dean

Austen discovered their enthusiasm and passion for administration through these circumstances. They never dreamt of becoming deans, but reluctantly agreed to serve as associate deans out of loyalty to their faculty colleagues. At first, Dean Austen agreed to serve as a department chair to assist the sitting chair who had become ill, while Dean Joyce agreed to serve as associate dean out of loyalty to his senior colleagues and the sitting dean. As associate deans, they realized that administration offered an opportunity to serve their students and faculty colleagues in a way that was different than scholarship and teaching. In part, Dean Austen also accepted the challenge of leading her college out of deficit because she wanted to make a difference by bolstering the academic profile of a public college.

### *Navigating College Context*

Along with the effects of identity and biography, college context affects how the profiled deans conceptualize their roles in shaping academic priorities. Most notably, the fiscal legacy of colleges defined the limits of the possible for deans in important ways. The deans of colleges that are flush with reserves have the resources to invest and the flexibility in deciding how and when to allocate these dollars. Dean Stowe and Dean Joyce, for example, inherited significant surpluses from their predecessors. With a surplus in her college, Dean Stowe enjoyed the luxury of waiting a year to pursue her signature project, which was establishing centers of excellence to stimulate creative forms of faculty research and teaching. Dean Joyce exercised even more patience, waiting several years to begin formulating a plan for investing the college's surplus in academic initiatives. The college's conditions enabled a more contemplative and

incremental approach, which suits his personality. With a sizeable surplus in his college, Dean Joyce could wait to initiate the right process at the right time to develop the right set of priorities. This fiscal stability underscored the extent to which Dean Joyce was not appointed to fix any problems in the college. Dean Swift knows that he can “hatch” ideas because his college has the resources to translate and implement many of the senior team's ideas into priorities. With the benefit of resources and time, deans whose colleges report surpluses can situate discussions of academic priorities in the future.

In contrast, the deans who inherited deficits were forced to rectify fiscal troubles at the expense of pursuing their own initiatives. These deans were more constricted in their opportunity to develop and implement their visions for their colleges. A sense of urgency supplanted a sense of opportunity for these deans; the focus was on survival. Before Dean Austen could even consider her own vision for the college, she needed to devise a fiscal strategy for covering the college’s debts. The dean would have preferred to engage the faculty about the college’s academic future, but summer workshops with faculty had to focus on advancing priorities that offered an immediate bottom-line benefit such as revising guidelines for summer salaries. Moreover, Dean Austen might have approached the tensions that emerged from faculty governance with more patience and tolerance had she not had to formulate reforms to improve the budget. Dean Huxley tabled designs for promoting interdisciplinary research and programs in favor of curtailing salaries and financial aid until he worked with administrators to dig the college out of debt. Without the benefit of resources and time, deans whose colleges report deficits feel forced to situate discussions of academic priorities in the immediate present, formulating plans that solve fiscal headaches more than advance academic missions.

The fiscal context of colleges shapes how deans make sense of academic priorities in another important way – it affects the relationship between the deans and the provost. The deans who lead colleges that report strong financial positions can engage the provost on their own terms. Dean Swift does not depend on the provost for resources to fund initiatives, but instead looks to the provost as a brainstorming partner who can help advance and inform the college’s nascent initiatives. Dean Stowe has mostly designed and implemented her vision of the centers of excellence without seeking the provost’s input.

In contrast, deans who inherit deficits are forced to focus on securing the confidence and trust of the provost’s office. Dean Austen spent most of her courtship and honeymoon as a dean learning about the Campus Budget model from the provost and vice provost and considering how to dig her college out of deficit. Dean Huxley has spent most of his tenure as dean trying to regain the confidence of the provost after they identified the college’s deficit during an annual budget review earlier in his tenure. As I explore in Chapter 9, a critical sensemaking activity during the annual budget review for the profiled deans is making sense of the provost’s priorities.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

The findings of this chapter contribute to the literature on academic deans in four important ways. First, I begin to specify how academic deans make sense of their own role in shaping academic priorities, which has yet to be explored by scholars in higher education. The profiled deans all espouse a commitment to collaboration and consultation while shaping academic priorities. The signature approaches of some deans to shaping

priorities, including instigating, extracting, synthesizing and orchestrating, emphasize engaging faculty and other administrators in their colleges. The profiled deans underscore that shaping academic priorities at a research university such as Sprawling University entails more than leveraging their formal authority. With vivid description, my findings animate earlier recommendations that deans should adopt collaborative and consultative approaches to leadership (Krahenbuhl, 2004; Morris, 1981; Tierney, 1989).

Second, I demonstrate that a rich pastiche of professional and personal factors affects how academic deans conceptualize their work, specifically their role in shaping academic priorities as deans. The explanations of profiled deans indicate that their conceptualizations of the deanship can be attributed to considerations that extend well beyond their disciplinary background, which has been the focus of past research on the background of academic deans. These deans have formulated an impression of how they should shape academic priorities, which reflects an amalgamation of many factors – their identities as faculty, including their disciplinary background; their socialization as junior faculty; their judgments of previous deans; their initial administrative experiences as department chairs and associate deans; their personal commitments to service; dimensions of their personal identities, including their faith; and other life experiences, including idiosyncratic episodes.

Third, unlike Del Favero (2005, 2006a, 2006b), the profiled deans did not articulate different orientations to leadership and management that could be attributed to their disciplinary backgrounds. The profiled deans represent a diverse set of academic disciplines, including those from low- and high-consensus fields and those from hard and soft fields and applied and pure fields. Instead their espoused approaches to shaping

priorities all underscore a similar orientation to collaboration and consultation, suggesting that the enduring effect of their identities as faculty was an appreciation for collegial norms. This finding echoes insights from earlier research in higher education that academic administrators share common ground with their faculty colleagues due to their academic training and socialization (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Cohen & March, 1974/1986; Del Favero & Bray, 2010; Dill, 1980).

Fourth, I demonstrate the important effect of a college's context on deanships, which has been ignored in most past research on academic deans. The tenor of a deanship not only depends on the dean, but also the circumstances of the dean's college. In particular, the fiscal context of colleges affects the extent to which academic deans can be the sorts of deans they want to be. A dean might articulate and espouse an academic vision, or an approach to shaping priorities, that proves difficult, if not impossible, due to fiscal circumstances. While some deans know of stressful circumstances upon assuming their roles, other deans come to realize these circumstances from experience during their first couple years. Yet past research that has explored the relationship between the academic backgrounds of deans and their management styles (Del Favero, 2005, 2006a, 2006b) has omitted this important effect of college context on enabling or constricting deans to lead and manage in their preferred fashion.

The findings of this chapter also contribute to the literature on sensemaking. First, my findings deepen our understanding of how senior managers who occupy ambiguous roles make sense of their work. Academic deans have been described as the middle managers of higher education (June, 2014), but this characterization is misleading in several respects, as explained in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. In addition to traversing



ambiguous authority structures, most academic deans receive little formal training before assuming their positions – either graduate training in management or professional development from their universities (Gmelch et al, 1999). My findings indicate that senior managers who inhabit these types of positions turn inwards and glance backwards to make sense of how to conceptualize and perform their work. While the profiled deans apply numerous sensemaking resources to understand their role in shaping academic priorities, including navigating the context of their colleges and across the university, they mostly made sense of their role by affirming their identities and validating biographical experiences. Managers in these positions leverage their own “raw material” to make sense of their work (Bennis, 2009).

Second, my findings illustrate an opportunity to broaden the range of factors that shape conceptions of identity with individual sensemaking at work. In organizational research, the concept of identity refers to the subjective meaning individuals derive from addressing the questions of “Who am I?” and then “What should I do?” or “How should I behave?” (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). My findings indicate that a broad set of factors animate these conceptions of identity at work. While professional identities, including disciplinary background, and early-career socialization defined notions of identity at work for the academic deans, other dimensions of identity did, too, including personal commitments to service, personal interpretations of religious faith and formative, if idiosyncratic biographical episodes.

Third, the experiences of the profiled deans illustrate that deep notions of identity might override the effect of stressful social context on individual sensemaking in many organizational settings. Unlike the dire circumstance at Mann Gulch, in which firefighters

confronted existential crisis after hearing the call to drop their tools (Weick, 1993), the profiled deans who either discovered or inherited trying conditions such as deficits were able to retain, if not affirm, at least some core notion of who they wanted to be as deans. The academic visions of Dean Huxley and Dean Austen were jeopardized by the fiscal circumstances of their college – they were saddled in their ability to pursue, let alone realize, their ambitions – but these deans, particularly Dean Austen, managed to enact a conception of the deanship that affirmed their professional identities and embodied their preferred approach to leadership. My findings underscore earlier observations that individuals make sense of work dramas by constructing narratives that privilege images of themselves that enhances their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Brown, Stacey & Nandhakumar, 2008).

With this baseline understanding of each dean’s approach to shaping academic priorities, I now turn my focus to examining how the profiled deans make sense of their role in shaping academic priorities during the annual budget review at Sprawling University. In the next chapter, I explore how these six deans approach navigating the most significant milestone of the university’s annual budget review – authoring the annual budget memorandum. As I detail in the next chapter, the espoused approaches for shaping academic priorities of the six profiled deans echo – and in other instances, contradict – how the deans approach the work of completing the annual budget memorandum for the provost’s office.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **Authoring the Annual Budget Memorandum:**

#### **Enacting Budgetary Authority during the Annual Budget Review**

##### **Introduction**

"Unleash the deans." This call embodies a central promise of decentralized, revenue-centered budget models such as Responsibility Center Management (RCM). With these budget models, authority for academic and budgetary affairs in colleges resides in dean's offices more than the provost's office (AAA&S, 2016b; Hearn et al, 2006; Strauss & Curry, 2002). Instead of operating as middle managers who administer the academic and fiscal agendas of provosts, academic deans assume authority over academic and fiscal affairs, which allows them to manage their colleges more like chief executives. Deans are incentivized to be entrepreneurs, developing new academic programs (and generating accompanying revenues), containing costs and charting the future vision of their colleges (Carlson, 2015; Curry, Laws & Strauss, 2013; Lasher & Sullivan, 2005). In their discussion of revenue-centered budget models, for example, Curry, Law and Strauss (2013) describe this budget framework as bestowing deans the authority to "manage their colleges strategically" (p. 105). "Being closer to the action, they are often the best qualified to understand their student and research 'markets' and to make academic-related financial decisions" (Curry, Law & Strauss, 2013, p. 105).

Despite this conventional wisdom, and the increasing prevalence of this form of budget model in private and public universities, researchers in higher education have yet to examine how academic deans actually navigate decentralized budget models. The literature in higher education tends to emphasize the specification of decentralized budget models, such as categorizing academic and administrative units and distributing tuition revenues across units, rather than exploring how administrators realize the espoused benefits of these models (Strauss & Curry, 2002; Whalen, 2002). Curry, Law and Strauss (2013), for example, conclude their guide on revenue-centered budget models by emphasizing that authority and responsibility shifts from the provost to deans, but without investigating the nature and implications of this shift. In an exception, Hearn et al (2006) explore the benefits and challenges of revenue-centered budget models by examining the implementation of this type of model at the University of Minnesota. They note the limited financial acumen of many deans, along with the mixed expertise of some finance directors in colleges, as notable challenges of revenue-centered budget models.

Despite its shortcomings, the literature on decentralized budget models in higher education identifies an important milestone that requires academic deans to enact their budgetary authority – writing budget memorandums during the annual budget reviews of their university. In decentralized budget models, the budget review typically begins with the provost sending instructions for a budget "call letter" to deans (Curry, Laws & Strauss, 2013). These instructions outline the university's estimates for revenues, including projections for important planning variables such as tuition rates, and often summarize the university's key priorities for the upcoming year. In contrast to centralized models, in which deans request funds for specific expenses or await their allocations as

determined by the provost's office, deans prepare their responses to call letters as budget proposals that estimate the college's revenues from tuition, research and other sources, examine contingencies that might affect these estimates and detail their academic and fiscal priorities for the coming year (Curry, Laws & Strauss, 2013; Lasher & Sullivan, 2005). The substance of this response to a call letter, which I refer to as a budget memorandum (or memo), serves as the foundation for an annual budget hearing between deans and senior central administrators such as the provost.

In this chapter, I begin to explore how the six profiled deans navigate the annual budget review at Sprawling University. In particular, I investigate how these deans author a version of a response to the budget call letter, the annual budget memorandum. My interviews and observations reveal that authorship of the budget memo constitutes the primary mechanism by which deans shape academic priorities during the budget review at Sprawling University. In the previous chapter, I found that a myriad of professional and personal experiences affected how deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities. In this chapter, I find that some of the profiled deans author the budget memo in a fashion that reflects their espoused approach to shaping academic priorities. Other deans, however, author the annual budget memo in ways that contradict their espoused approach. In the discussion, I begin to explore the role of sensemaking in explaining this overlap and contradiction. But before examining approaches to authorship, I first describe the annual budget review at Sprawling University.

## **Overview of Annual Budget Review at Sprawling University**

At Sprawling University, academic deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review through two primary mechanisms – authoring the annual budget memorandum and preparing for the annual budget conference. The budget memo, which is rarely discussed outside the closed-door confines of the provost’s office and deans’ offices, is the closest thing to an annual report for each college at the university; it features a snapshot of the academic activities, strategic priorities and fiscal position of each college. Importantly, the budget memo is the primary artifact of the annual budget review and the foundation for the annual budget conference. In this meeting, the dean of each college, often along with other administrators from colleges such as the finance director and associate and assistant deans, meets with the provost and other administrators in the provost’s office to discuss the fiscal and academic affairs of their college. For these reasons, a senior central administrator describes the budget memo as “very important” and the budget review as “the most important time in the year for taking a global look at how the college is doing, all aspects of the college.”

The calendar for the annual budget review extends from fall into the following summer. In the late fall, the provost’s office sends every dean instructions for the budget memo. Deans have two to three months to prepare and submit their memos. The annual budget conference occurs approximately a month after colleges submit their memos. Within a month of the conference, the colleges are asked to submit a revised set of enrollment projections; and then they submit a final projection for enrollment in late spring. As spring blossoms into summer, the provost’s office submits preliminary budget allocations to the colleges; from these figures, the colleges begin to finalize their own

internal budget allocations. After the Board of Trustees meets in the summer, the provost's office then distributes the official budget allocations to each college.

### **The Annual Budget Memorandum**

The most important artifact of the annual budget review is the annual budget memorandum. The budget memo features seven sections. The first section, Objectives, asks deans to describe the goals of their colleges, recent progress against these goals, specific plans for the upcoming year and how these goals and plans for their colleges intersect the strategic initiatives of the provost's office. In the second section, Reallocation, the dean lists the college's activities that will be eliminated or delayed over the next year. The provost's office determines an exact percentage of reallocation every year; the figure ranges between one and two percent of expenditures for each college. The third section, Planning, asks for an overview of the college's projected enrollment, projected faculty counts, including plans for faculty hiring, and plans for facilities. The fourth section, Diversity, asks deans to describe the college's initiatives aimed at enhancing diversity in their colleges. The fifth section, Fund Balances, asks deans to report the fund balances for their colleges; this section represents the "financials" of the budget memo. The sixth section, Questions, provides an open-ended space for deans to request that specific issues are added to the agenda for the budget conference. The seventh section, Requests, provides deans an opportunity to request additional resources from the provost's office for the upcoming year.

The instructions for the budget memo are unexciting. The template for the memo occupies five pages. It includes six empty data tables to populate. The template begins

with a nondescript prompt: “Instructions: Please complete the sections below within the stated parameters, including the original questions with your answers. You may choose to add additional information in the attachments.” For each question, the provost’s office specifies a page length for responses. “No more than one page” accompanies most questions; on occasion, deans are afforded “No more than two pages” to respond. The accompanying cover letter offers no guidance beyond listing the date and time of the college’s budget conference with the provost and specifying the administrator in the provost’s office who should receive a .pdf copy of the memo. The cover letter, which is signed by the provost and a vice provost, concludes with the following note: “We remain committed to the thoughtful use of our resources to ensure the continued excellence in our core missions of education and research.”

The idea for the annual budget memorandum and budget conference can be traced to a former senior central administrator at Sprawling University. As a professor, this former administrator researched the government’s budget practices. From this research, this administrator concluded, “it’s good for people in positions of authority to reflect on some reasonable cycle on what they think they’re doing.” The genesis for the budget memo reflects this desire to provide academic deans some mechanism for making sense of their goals and priorities for their colleges. “The purpose of that memo for me was by the way ask for help or not – what are you doing and how well situated are you to do it?” Moreover, the budget memo and budget conference allow the provost’s office to monitor the academic and fiscal decisions of deans. “Having your senior staff [in the provost’s office] be well acquainted with what was going on from the perspective of the deans and the dean’s senior budget staffs struck me as being very, very useful.” The budget memo



intends to capture not only a dean's interpretation of their college's past academic and fiscal performance, but also their interpretation of their college's future vision and challenges. "What was up, what was coming down the road, what should we be looking for and begin to try to put together a sketch of how the budget would fit together."

A senior central administrator echoes this purpose of the budget memo. By summarizing a dean's interpretation of their college's academic and financial plans, the budget memo provides the foundation for the budget conference between the provost and deans. This administrator describes an effective budget memo as "having substantive content, telling [the provost's office] what [deans] have actually achieved, what their goals are, what their aspirations are ... this is where we succeeded and where we failed, and why we failed." This explanation underscores the extent to which the budget memo serves as an annual report for colleges, summarizing both fiscal and academic performance. The summary, however, should feature details. This administrator expects budget memos to include "a lot of content, not just at the 10,000-foot level." Moreover, the best budget memos also articulate the dean's vision for the college into the future. "I think it's important to have a real multi-year perspective on the budget itself, a real plan that is not just reactive but is forward-looking."

## **Findings**

The six profiled academic deans all receive the same set of instructions from the provost's office, but they choose to author the budget memo in different ways. This variation comes to life while interviewing deans as well as finance directors, associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors in their colleges. My analysis of

interviews, along with observations of meetings about the budget memo in some of the colleges, reveals that the six deans adopt three different approaches to authoring the annual budget memo – dominating, distributing and delegating – which I explore below.

### **Dominating Authorship**

#### *Dean Stowe*

Dean Stowe is clear – she assumes ultimate responsibility for writing the annual budget memo. “I’ve explained this to my faculty, ‘I do the budget,’” adding, “my instructions ... carry absolute priority.” In fact, Dean Stowe writes most of the budget memo herself. Apart from the finance director, she engages few individuals during the annual budget review beyond occasionally soliciting feedback from faculty members on the executive committee or the chief development officer. She concedes, “I am probably fairly light” in “organizing human resources” across the college during the budget review. In part, the dean’s approach reflects her belief that the college’s budgeting is predictable; the only “big decisions” every year are projecting faculty hiring and financial aid expenditures. “Over 90 percent of the budget is either faculty or staff wages or benefits or student financial support. So, all of the other stuff falls into about seven percent or eight percent of the budget.”

Dean Stowe dominates authorship, but asks the college’s finance director to provide critical data for the budget memo. The finance director, who the dean describes as “extremely competent,” helps her understand “the implications” of different fiscal assumptions. The dean meets with the finance director several times during the budget review. After receiving the provost’s instructions for the memo, Dean Stowe provides the

finance director with initial estimates for faculty hiring and financial aid; with this information, the finance director assembles a “numerical boiler plate” that includes financial projections. While the finance director compiles this data, Dean Stowe assembles a “working document” by writing the sections that focus on goals and progress on goals. In the past year’s memo, for example, the dean emphasized efforts to attract new resources for faculty research and financial aid. After completing these sections, the dean and finance director meet to review financial projections, which helps the dean to “wrestle with” putting the memo “all together” and avoid “any unpleasant ramifications” during the budget conference with the provost. “We make sure it all actually matches up.” She reviews the memo at home over a weekend – “one careful reading through” – before submitting it to the provost’s office.

### **Distributing Authorship**

#### *Dean Austen*

Dean Austen knows her college’s budget in great detail. “If you ask me about any piece [in the budget memo], I could tell you where that number came from and why I believe in it. I’m not putting anything out there that I don’t know why that is.” She argues that deans need to “understand the numbers” in their budgets “very, very, very deeply” because balances can “go bad – like that.” “The price of being wrong is the quality of the thing that we care about most – the quality of the student experience, the quality of faculty, the quality of support for research ... The price of being wrong is high. You better pay attention.” An associate dean emphasizes the dean’s exacting attitude with the budget memo. “Our dean is extraordinarily data driven or evidence-based driven, to her

credit.” With this ethos, Dean Austen takes pride in authoring the budget memo. “Our document actually is good,” adding, “I stand by the quality of the document.” Despite its narrow page limits, the dean includes many details about the college in the budget memo. “It is brief yet meaty ... it is brief enough so people actually read it ... We provide a lot of meat there and so people actually read it and they actually engage with it.”

Under the dean’s direction, the college’s finance director coordinates authorship of the budget memo. The dean and the finance director first outline a draft of the document. “We sit down and we say, ‘let’s look at all these sections’ and ‘who is going to write these sections?’ This is where I want to get the memo.” In the dean’s words, “sections get carved out” to members of the senior team. One associate dean, for example, wrote several paragraphs about graduate education for this year’s memo. Another associate dean describes a similar scene. “It’s not just me, it’s a lot of us because a number of us are in charge of various parts ... She’ll ask each of us for input on that and we’ll give descriptions and then she massages that into an overall narrative.” As associate deans draft passages about research accomplishments, diversity initiatives and projected enrolments, the finance director compiles financial data and formulates plans for reallocation while the dean writes key sections on goals and progress on goals.

After integrating everyone’s contributions into a draft, the finance director distributes the memo to the senior team for review. Dean Austen explains, “I write key goals and progress, but then very importantly, I share that part of the memo with the whole [senior] team for feedback.” The finance director emphasizes that the team collaborates to finalize the memo before submitting it to the provost’s office. “We get it in a close enough draft, then we review it with all the senior team.” At this point, the dean

also enlists the expertise of the senior team to discuss other sections of the memo. The dean, for example, consulted the team about submitting a request for supplemental resources. “In requests, we brainstormed that in the [senior team meeting] and then [the finance director] and I wrote it up with the help of relevant associate deans.” The team decided to submit three requests, including a proposal to fund the start-up costs of a new degree program and new educational technology.

The senior team, therefore, assumes an integral role in authorship. Dean Austen wants the memo to reflect deep “thinking” and “engagement” from the senior team. In contrast to the previous dean, an associate dean argues that Dean Austen wants “to run [the memo] by everybody.” The finance director echoes this depiction, saying, “I think it worked well because ... everyone on the [senior] team has been involved in the creation of the document.” This approach contrasts with how colleagues in other colleges describe their approaches to authoring the budget memo. “I’ve just heard from my colleagues ... it’s very much like it’s written in isolation from the unit ... But that is not so with ours.”

#### *Dean Huxley*

Dean Huxley argues that members of the college’s senior team “contribute a lot” to the budget memo. The finance director characterizes the dean as being “very large on consensus building” while crafting the memo. The dean has “specific visions,” but “those are flexible based on what input he might receive from other folks.” The memo describes the college’s vision, which is “set by the dean,” but “of course, the associate deans have a lot of input into” the priorities. In fact, the dean explains that the senior team often anticipates issues and problems that are explored in the budget memo. “When the

strategic issues that are addressed in the budget document come up, a lot of those issues have been chewed on on an ongoing basis already.”

At the dean’s behest, the finance director “steers” the “whole process” of authoring the budget memo. Before engaging the senior team, Dean Huxley meets with the finance director to create a rough outline of the document. In particular, they probe for potential “red flags” that could emerge from the budget memo. The finance director projects the college’s enrollment and expenditures, “crunching” the “what ifs and hows.” From this analysis, for example, they decided to identify some “challenges” this past year such as “floating” a potential request for supplemental resources to build new classrooms.

After creating this “base document,” Dean Huxley and the finance director work in parallel to draft the memo. First, the finance director solicits ideas from members of the senior team. In recent years, the finance director and an associate dean have interviewed members of the senior team to capture their ideas for the budget memo. Second, Dean Huxley “fleshes out” his ideas for the memo into a more coherent draft. The dean “thinks about” the college’s goals and composes most of the text that describes the college’s progress on key goals. After the finance director compiles this full draft, the dean meets with the senior team to discuss feedback on the entire memo. At this stage, an associate dean explains that the senior team “worked a lot” on the document. The dean describes these discussions as “always content jammed” and “productive.” After they “talk through” edits as a team, the finance director and dean “mash things up” to create a refined draft for the provost’s office.

*Dean Joyce*

Dean Joyce seizes “quite an active role” throughout the annual budget review. “I’m used to writing budgets; it comes very naturally to me, so I get involved.” The finance director echoes this characterization, describing the dean as “extremely” and “truly” invested in the budget review – writing the budget memo, scrutinizing budget data and preparing for the budget conference. Similarly, an assistant dean describes the dean as “working very closely” on the memo. Dean Joyce, for example, writes the sections on the college’s goals. “In crafting the memo, I basically take sole responsibility for the discussion of our progress on goals, our current year goals.” This assessment is his to articulate as dean. “Assessing and reporting on and promulgating our strategic vision is one of my chief responsibilities, and so I execute that.”

Dean Joyce, however, emphasizes that authoring the budget memo is a collaborative effort. With his approach to extracting priorities, the dean wants members of the senior team to shape the memo. While the dean pens the college’s goals, the finance director compiles financial data and “farms out” other sections to associate deans and assistant deans to write “their pieces,” which includes the college’s plans for hiring faculty, promoting research, supporting students and increasing diversity. Dean Joyce explains, “I discuss sections with other people who are drafting them, but mostly those are delegated to the people who have those areas of responsibility.”

Members of the senior team highlight this collaborative effort. An associate dean describes the dean’s approach to distributing authorship as “the budget memo is divvy-upped amongst various responsible parties; and then they drive language that’s submitted to dean. [Dean Joyce] would then process that and formulate the final document.” An

assistant dean, for example, wrote “two or three things” for the most recent memo. The dean asked another associate dean to provide “facts and figures” and write “paragraphs” about initiatives for promoting faculty research. Members of the team not only draft specific text for specific sections of the memo, but also discuss their feedback on drafts as a team. An assistant dean recalls, “the draft was sent around to us, so I was able to look at it and see if there were other things that I had input on.”

Dean Joyce seeks input from the college’s senior team, but stresses that budget decisions are ultimately his to make. “It’s up to me to, at least I take responsibility for setting the net target whether or not we’re going to save money or spend money or have a balanced budget this year.” Moreover, the dean wants the memo to capture the college’s actual academic and fiscal priorities. “My role ... is to set our high-level priorities. Should we be spending more on the PhD program? ... What kind of salary program should we plan for this year?” During the second meeting with the finance team, for example, the dean reviews, or “drills down,” the bottom-line projections to understand broader implications for the college, approving certain allocations while rejecting others. “The direction setting, I set at the high level and then [the finance director] and [the finance] team executes it; and then I review certain decisions to make sure that I’m comfortable with them.” With reallocation projections, for example, the finance director formulated a list of possibilities, which she then discussed with the dean; the dean then selected the options that best facilitated the college’s priorities.

The finance director coordinates the financial analyses for the budget memo – “all of the detail work” – but Dean Joyce still assumes a prominent role in scrutinizing this data. He reviews budget figures with the finance team twice before submitting the budget



memo to the provost's office. In these meetings, the dean scrutinizes data in tables, demonstrating impressive facility with specific details. During the first review meeting, for example, he immediately questioned the total amount of expenditures for faculty salaries from the general fund; the total seemed too low, reciting the allocation of salaries for specific faculty members across numerous funds. With respect to a transfer between funds, the dean pressed a budget analyst for clarification, stressing, "don't guess, that's a big enough number that we need to know the answer." After meeting for an hour, Dean Joyce exhibited little sign of fatigue, reading through every line of budget tables and asking for clarification when a number seemed too low or high. During these discussions, he stressed the importance of accuracy. After asking a question about scholarships for doctoral students, he underscored "Let's not speculate. Let's find out what it is."

### *Dean Swift*

Dean Swift considers the annual budget memo as more than a financial document. "We should really call it the budget and planning document because there's actually a lot more information there about programs and planning than just numbers. I mean the numbers, you can get any day you want." Instead the dean frames the budget memo as an opportunity to explore the college's academic and fiscal priorities. "For me, part of it is an exercise to represent part of what we're doing, part of what we're planning and to provide enough justification for any additional financial request."

With his emphasis on "cooking up" ideas, Dean Swift leverages the expertise of the college's senior team to draft the budget memo. He describes this collective work of writing and editing the memo as "a serious job." Under the direction of the finance director, who the dean describes as having "her fingers in every pie" across the college,

the dean, associate deans and administrative directors collaborate to “construct” the budget memo. The finance director meets with the dean to outline a “rough draft,” discussing “major things that we want to include” in the memo. The finance director then “parses out” this outline to associate deans and administrative directors, asking them to write sections that intersect their domains of responsibility. An associate dean reveals the extent to which members of the senior team expect to write a portion of the memo, saying, “Obviously, everyone’s got their own piece.”

After receiving contributions from the associate deans and administrative directors, the finance director assembles a full draft of the budget memo for the team to scrutinize. The dean dedicates an entire meeting of the senior team to discuss the budget memo. To initiate this discussion, the finance director asks, "I'm not sure all the associate deans have an idea of what they would like to do ... It would be good to discuss it as a group to make sure ... what do we want to put in this document for next year?" The discussion not only generates content for the memo, which entails associate deans or administrative directors volunteering to write additional text, but also reveals new ideas and initiatives to include in the memo. During this meeting, for example, the senior team decided to recast the college’s existing diversity efforts as a larger initiative and reexamine the college’s online education activities.

After capturing the team’s feedback, the finance director “massages” the budget memo, crafting a more polished draft. The finance director believes the dean and senior team want “a document that anybody could pick up and know what we’re talking about and you didn’t have to be an insider to understand it.” An associate dean stresses this point; the memo cannot be written “in jargon mode” because administrators in the

president's and provost's office might read the document. At this stage, Dean Swift edits the memo "in a more serious way." "When I see [a polished] draft, I actually read it very thoroughly and mark it up." In fact, the finance director often directs the dean to write specific text. "There may be places there where [the finance director] has said, 'I need a paragraph from you here, here and here on these topics.' I do some of the actual writing." With the dean's additions, the finance director edits the document one more time before redistributing it across the senior team for review. An associate dean describes the senior team as "bumping" the final draft back and forth, adding that this "iterative" process illustrates the team's collaborative "way."

### **Delegating Authorship**

#### *Dean Conrad*

Dean Conrad delegates authorship of the budget memo. In fact, the writing process engages only two other administrators – an associate dean and the finance director. The dean explains that an associate dean drafts an "initial run" of the memo while the finance director compiles "all the numbers and budgetary information." The associate dean then asks the dean for his feedback; and after a quick review, Dean Conrad submits the memo to the provost's office. "They will do a draft, I will look at it, I will make changes ... It all comes to me. I look at it, I make some changes, suggestions. And then we're done." The memo is written in "one take," according to one administrator.

Dean Conrad frames his role in authorship as shaping the memo's overall message. During his first year as dean, he "drafted the initial [memo]," but then asked the associate dean to write subsequent memos; the dean considers his initial memo as a

“template” for the associate dean to follow. Dean Conrad espouses this approach for several reasons. First, he does not want to “reinvent the wheel” because his first memo “laid out all the details” about the college. Second, the memo mostly summarizes progress on “multi-year” initiatives that have been described in previous budget memos.

Despite this vision for the budget memo, administrators who write the budget memo describe the dean as disinterested in contributing to the memo. Dean Conrad “doesn't even get involved,” according to one administrator. Administrators explain that he offers few contributions. One administrator describes the dean as ambivalent about “planning,” which complicates efforts to draft the memo. The dean, for example, asked this administrator to include an update on the college’s curriculum in the most recent budget memo. This administrator heeded the dean’s suggestion, asking him for suggestions, but the dean never responded to the request. The dean’s silence frustrated the administrator. “I just tried to change the wording [from the previous year’s memo], but there is nothing because we didn’t discuss it.” This administrator describes the memo as a “glowing document” that offers few “concrete” updates. “It was ... ‘we’re still implementing our new curriculum.’ ‘We’re still doing this.’”

By design, Dean Conrad does not solicit feedback about the budget memo from the college’s senior team. On occasion, he might ask an associate dean or department chair for ideas, but he prefers to wait until attending the budget conference to discuss the budget within the college. “Once we put it together, we get it to the provost and then once we get the approval, then we come back and say ‘this is what they are willing to approve’ and then they take a look at that.” The dean feels little need to consult these colleagues during the budget review because they know “what our initiatives are.” “We pretty much

telegraph what we're doing ahead of time so they know what the issues are.” Moreover, Dean Conrad knows what people inside and outside the college expect of him. “At the end of the day, what's important to the faculty and the [department chairs] is that we are a top ranked college, we are considered among the very best in the country.”

### **Chapter Discussion**

This chapter has examined how the six profiled academic deans enact their budgetary authority during the university’s annual budget review by authoring an annual budget memorandum for the provost. Senior administrators at the university envision the annual budget memo as a formal opportunity for deans to make sense of their priorities for their colleges; in essence, the budget memo serves as an annual report for colleges. The authorship of the budget memo emerged as the primary mechanism by which deans shape academic priorities during the budget review. In subsequent chapters, I demonstrate how and why deans leverage authorship to shape academic priorities, but this chapter sets the stage for these investigations by exploring how deans approach this work. In the discussion, I first specify the three approaches to authoring the budget memo and summarize the ways in the profiled deans enacted their budget authority while authoring the memo. Second, I begin to explore the extent to which the profiled deans enacted their espoused approaches to shaping academic priorities while authoring the budget memo, revisiting key observations from Chapter 5.

### **Approaches to Authoring the Budget Memo**

The six profiled deans adopted one of three approaches to authoring the annual budget memorandum. Four of the deans adopted a more inclusive approach – distributing

authorship. This approach demonstrates a collaborative orientation to writing the budget memo by engaging individuals throughout colleges. Dean Austen, Dean Huxley, Dean Joyce and Dean Swift adopt variations of this approach, leveraging the expertise and experience of administrators in the college – finance directors, assistant deans, associate deans and administrative directors – to help draft the budget memo. These deans distribute authorship in three ways. First, deans charge administrators, often finance directors in the college, to facilitate the compilation of various sections of the memo into a draft. Second, deans ask other administrators in the college such as associate deans to write sections of the budget memo that pertain to their area of responsibility. Third, deans convene these administrators as a team to discuss drafts of the budget memo, soliciting their feedback on the entire document.

In contrast, the two other deans adopted more exclusive approaches to authorship. A second approach, dominating authorship, entails a dean mostly compiling and writing the budget memo in isolation from other administrators. Dean Stowe adopts this approach, choosing not to engage other colleagues while drafting the memo. She depends on the college's finance director to compile essential data such as fund balances and enrollment projections, but retains control over writing the memo's content, including articulating the college's strategic goals and defining important financial parameters.

A third approach, delegating authorship, reflects the most passive enactment of budgetary authority observed among the deans. Dean Conrad has adopted this approach to authoring the memo. He has articulated a vision for the budget memo – he wants the document to accomplish specific ends – but deliberately withdraws from writing the memo. Instead Dean Conrad cedes authorship to several senior administrators in the

college. He claims little editorial license beyond requesting that certain issues be included in the memo, determining who writes the memo and reviewing a final draft.

### **Enacting Budget Authority during the Budget Review**

The literature in higher education has yet to explore how academic deans navigate decentralized, revenue-centered budget models. My findings begin to close this gap, describing how the profiled deans enact their budgetary authority during Sprawling University's annual budget review by authoring an annual budget memorandum for the provost. First, some deans assume active roles in analyzing and scrutinizing fiscal data for the budget memo. Dean Austen professes fiscal vigilance during the annual budget review, claiming to know every figure in her budget memo. Dean Joyce also demonstrates deep knowledge of his college's budget; while reviewing budget projections, he identifies inaccuracies by simply scanning a table. While these two deans consult their finance directors throughout the budget review, they could probably complete financial analyses for the budget memo by themselves, if they had the time.

Second, deans empower their finance directors during the budget review. The demonstration of keen financial acumen is not the only way deans enact their budgetary authority. Deans do not need to be financial wizards to navigate their colleges through the budget review; in fact, the degree of expertise exhibited by Dean Austen and Dean Joyce is an unrealistic standard for most deans to attain. Instead the profiled deans enacted budgetary authority in other important ways, including entrusting essential work to their finance directors. During authorship of the budget memo, all of the finance directors assumed important roles. At the very least, they collected and analyzed financial data for

the memo, including fund balances and enrollment projections. The profiled deans demonstrate that academic deans do not need to understand every aspect of their college's budget, but they would be wise to hire (and retain) finance directors who do.

In addition, finance directors assumed important management roles during authorship. In effect, the finance directors often served as project managers for the budget memo. The finance director in Dean Swift's college, for example, did much more than assemble data for the budget memo: she met with the dean to create an initial outline of the memo; she tasked the associate deans and administrative directors with writing portions of the memo; she assembled a full draft that included everyone's contributions; she solicited feedback during a team meeting; she incorporated edits from members of the senior team; she delegated the editing of the document; she tasked the dean and other members of the team to write final edits for the memo; and she submitted the document to the provost's office. Similarly, the finance directors for Dean Austen, Dean Huxley and Dean Joyce assumed managerial roles during the budget review, shepherding essential aspects of authorship.

Third, most of the deans enacted budgetary authority by marshaling the expertise of their senior administrative teams to author the budget memo. The deans who distributed authorship assigned portions of the memo to members of their senior team to write, including associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors. These deans believed that the best people to describe initiatives are the administrators who lead them. Deans cannot always describe initiatives such as efforts to stimulate faculty research, improve undergraduate education or increase student diversity with the same level of detail as the administrators who oversee these initiatives in the college; and even if they



can, deans probably do not have the time to muster recollections of pertinent details at the expense of other responsibilities.

These deans invited members of their senior teams to not only write portions of the budget memo, but also to examine and critique other sections of the budget memo, including sections that deans wrote themselves. Moreover, these deans solicit feedback on drafts of the budget memo by convening their senior teams to discuss drafts of the budget memo. By exploring drafts as a team, deans and their senior teams discuss and debate the college's academic priorities, capturing a diversity of perspectives that enrich the descriptions of priorities in the budget memo. This distributive approach to authoring the budget memo should not be conceived as shirking budgetary responsibility; these deans are not passing the buck to other administrators in their colleges. Instead these deans want to leverage the expertise and experience across their senior teams to draft an accurate, descriptive and persuasive budget memo. In Chapter 7, I explore the reasons why deans engage their senior teams during authorship in greater detail.

Fourth, deans enacted their budgetary authority by writing text for the budget memo. By putting pen to paper, deans articulate the direction and vision of their colleges by describing key goals and prominent initiatives. With the exception of Dean Conrad, the profiled deans wrote substantial text for their budget memos. By design, Dean Stowe composes nearly every word of her college's memo. The deans who distribute authorship also emphasize the importance of writing content for the memo. In particular, deans focus their energies on writing the sections on goals and progress against goals. Dean Austen and Dean Joyce stress that articulating the strategic goals of their colleges in the budget memo is an important responsibility of serving as dean.

In addition to these four ways that the profiled deans enacted their budgetary authority, all of the deans acknowledge a practical rationale for adopting their approaches to authoring the budget memo – economizing time. Deans hope to economize their time by adopting their approach to authorship. Although the deans who distribute authorship offer numerous reasons for adopting their approach – I explore these rationales in the following chapters – they underscore the practical necessity of distributing authorship across the senior team. By adopting this approach, deans can focus on completing specific dimensions of the budget memo and managing other critical responsibilities. Dean Swift attended to other responsibilities such as development and external relations, Dean Austen concentrated on writing more “strategic” sections of the memo and Dean Joyce dedicated more time to explaining the college’s priorities for the budget memo and scrutinizing specific budget figures with the finance team. Deans who adopt different approaches to authorship also aim to economize time, but the time of their colleagues. By dominating authorship, Dean Stowe hopes to save associate deans in her college from the hassle of diverting time away from their primary responsibilities. Dean Conrad also extols the benefits of saving time by delegating authorship of the memo. He does not want administrators in the college to reinvent the template for the budget memo.

### **Conceptualizing How to Shape Academic Priorities during the Budget Review**

The findings of this chapter uncover more than detailing how academic deans enact their budget authority during the annual budget review and specifying different approaches to authoring annual budget memorandums. In addition to beginning to illustrate how academic deans navigate annual budget reviews in revenue-centered

budget models, my findings begin to illustrate how academic deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities during the annual budget review.

The ways the profiled deans shaped academic priorities and enacted budget authority during the annual budget review often reflected their broader approaches to shaping academic priorities. First, the deans who distribute authorship demonstrate their espoused commitments to collaboration and consultation, which was examined in Chapter 5. Dean Swift's collaborative and iterative style of authoring the budget memo typifies his preferred practice of brainstorming, or "cooking up," priorities with the college's senior team. Dean Austen writes key sections of the budget memo, but asks members of the college's senior team to not only draft specific sections of the document, but also to discuss the memo as a team and critique her articulation of the college's key goals. Dean Joyce's approach to authoring the budget memo embodies his aim to extract priorities from discussions with other individuals in the college. He depends on members of the senior team not only to write descriptions of priorities, but also to debate and edit the entire document as a team. Dean Huxley demonstrates his commitment to consensual leadership by tasking the finance director and an associate dean to interview members of the senior team while drafting the budget memo. He avoids imposing his own will on the process, preferring to formulate a collective articulation of priorities for the budget memo. This approach to authorship embodies the signature approaches of these deans to shaping academic priorities. Dean Swift, for example, orchestrates completion of the budget memo. Similarly, Dean Joyce exhibits his vision of extracting priorities in his approach to authoring the budget memo.

Second, for some deans, their academic training and disciplinary background inform their approach to authoring the annual budget memo. Dean Joyce and Dean Austen affirm their disciplinary identities by claiming active roles in scrutinizing financial data. For Dean Austen and Dean Joyce, the process of authoring the budget memo offers an opportunity to demonstrate their technical expertise, particularly their strong quantitative skills, which affirms their scholarly identity. These two deans take great pride in knowing very specific financial details in the budget memo; in fact, as academic deans, they probably exhibit a unique capacity to analyze and comprehend budgetary figures. Dean Swift's approach to authorship also affirms and demonstrates the norms of his discipline. His collaborative and iterative style of authoring the budget memo embodies his discipline's emphasis on analyzing and solving problems in teams.

The ways that some profiled deans shape academic priorities and enact budget authority during the annual budget review, however, deviate from their espoused approach to shaping academic priorities. The deans who dominate and delegate authorship, Dean Stowe and Dean Conrad, do not exhibit their preference for collaboration and consultation while shaping academic priorities. Despite emphasizing a need to engage faculty and administrative colleagues, these two deans adopt exclusive approaches to authorship of the budget memo. Dean Conrad's approach to authorship does not demonstrate his espoused preference for promoting "open dialogue" or instigating discussions with the department chairs and associate deans. Dean Stowe authors the budget memo by herself, which contrasts sharply with her espoused preference to synthesize priorities and promote consensus across the college.

In part, this variation between espoused commitment and enacted reality for these two deans can be attributed to competing notions of meaning from past experiences. Dean Conrad and Dean Stowe adopt approaches to authorship that privilege lessons from other professional experiences, which were foreshadowed in Chapter 5, over their espoused commitments to collaboration and consultation. Dean Conrad's approach reflects a staunch aversion to micromanaging, which dates back to his tenure as a department chair. He wants the budget memo to mention certain initiatives, but does not feel compelled to write this text or coordinate its creation. Moreover, Dean Conrad does not want to belabor a point that should be obvious to members of the college's senior team by now – advancing faculty research and the multidisciplinary curriculum are the college's academic priorities. Finally, as explored in Chapter 9, Dean Conrad envisions little reason to pursue a different approach to authorship because the provost has funded the college's special funding requests for academic priorities.

With Dean Stowe, the variation between her espoused approach to shaping academic priorities and her enacted approach to authorship reflect her increasing belief that the annual budget review does not really matter for her college. The college reports a surplus and its budget allocations are predictable, which offers little reason to hassle them during a busy time of the academic year. In short, she has concluded that the budget review is of minimal consequence. An irony emerges from her explanation: Dean Stowe seems to abandon her consensual style of leadership and understated persona by dominating authorship. She avoids burdening associate deans and administrative directors during the annual budget review, which I explore in detail in Chapter 9.

## Chapter Conclusion

In decentralized, revenue-centered budget models, academic deans assume more authority and responsibility over academic and fiscal affairs. Colleges become financial tubs on their own bottoms; sink or swim, the academic and financial destiny of colleges depends more on deans. Despite the increasing prevalence of these budget models in universities, and these new stakes for deans, researchers in higher education have not examined how academic deans actually navigate annual budget reviews at universities with decentralized budget models. This chapter begins to close this gap in the literature.

My findings advance our understanding of how academic deans enact their budgetary authority in decentralized budget models in four important ways. First, my findings identify and specify three different ways that academic deans approach the work of completing a response to a budget call letter – dominating, distributing or delegating authorship. The literature on decentralized budget models in higher education has suggested the importance of these documents, suggesting that responses to budget call letters exhibit the newfound autonomy and authority of academic deans in these budget frameworks. Instead of awaiting marching orders from the provost’s office, academic deans are expected to formulate, articulate, justify and fund the academic priorities in their colleges. Despite suggesting that these documents illustrate how academic deans enact their authority in decentralized budget models, researchers in higher education have not examined the ways in which academic deans write and compile these documents.

Second, my findings begin to describe the extent to which academic deans engage their senior teams while drafting annual budget memorandums for the provost in decentralized budget models. Proponents of revenue-centered budget models

acknowledge that authority and responsibility shift from the provost's office to dean's offices, but they have yet to explore how academic deans engage their colleagues in their colleges to enact this budgetary authority. My findings begin to close this surprising omission. Administrators in colleges, including finance directors, associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors, assume often intensive and nuanced roles in advising deans during annual budget reviews and contributing to authorship of annual budget memos. In particular, my findings demonstrate the critical role that finance directors assume in authoring annual budget memos, which echoes earlier assertions that finance directors in colleges assume more importance in decentralized budget models (Hearn et al, 2006). In addition to compiling essential fiscal data, finance directors often served as project managers who were responsible for coordinating completion of budget memos on behalf of their deans. In Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, I explore the relationship between deans and their senior teams in more detail.

Third, my findings begin to specify the extent to which academic deans frame annual budget reviews in decentralized budget models as opportunities to shape academic priorities in their colleges. Proponents have described the responses of deans to budget call letters as proposals that summarize both financial and academic priorities for colleges (Curry, Laws & Strauss, 2013). My findings suggest that authorship of the budget memo constitutes more than drafting an annual report on the college. Some of the profiled deans conceptualize the budget review as an opportunity to formulate and clarify academic priorities for their colleges, particularly among their senior teams. These deans affirm their espoused commitments to collaboration and consultation while shaping academic priorities during the budget review. In contrast, other deans frame authorship of the

budget memo more as a check-the-box task to complete for the provost's office rather than an opportunity to shape the priorities of their colleges.

Fourth, my findings begin to illustrate the extent to which research on deans has tended to conceptualize the work of deans as a menu of discrete tasks rather than a braided collage of activities. Montez, Wolverton and Gmelch (2002), for example, identified the following activities as discrete tasks that were central to deanships: "develop and initiate long-range college goals" and "financial planning, budget preparation, and decision making" under the category "external and political relations"; "solicit ideas to improve the college" and "plan and conduct college leadership team meetings" under the category of "leadership"; "manage college resources" under "resource management"; and "maintain effective communication across departments/divisions" and "communicate goals/mission to college employees/constituents" under the category of "internal productivity."

My findings, however, demonstrate that the profiled deans regularly found themselves engaging these tasks simultaneously while crafting annual budget memos with their senior teams. Meetings of senior teams to discuss authorship of annual budget memos encapsulated numerous key tasks of deans. The discussion could be characterized not only as preparing or planning the budget, but also as soliciting ideas to improve the college, developing the college's goals or communicating goals. The complexity of a dean's work is defined by not only the multitude of tasks that confront them, but also the interplay of these tasks.

With these insights about authorship of annual budget memos, I now turn my attention to exploring why the profiled deans adopt their approaches to authorship. These



reasons, some of which have been foreshadowed in this past chapter, emphasize the role that senior administrative teams assume in assisting academic deans during the annual budget review. Despite the importance of this relationship, the literature on academic deans offers surprisingly few insights about the relationship between deans and their senior administrative teams, including why and how deans engage their senior teams to shape academic priorities or inform resource allocation. In the next chapter, I explore a phenomenon that emerged from interviews and observations during the annual budget review at Sprawling University – the extent to which the profiled academic deans leveraged authorship of the annual budget memo to establish a collective sense of academic priorities among their senior teams.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **Making Sense of Academic Priorities as a Team:**

#### **Establishing a Collective Sense of Priorities During the Annual Budget Review**

##### **Introduction**

Deans often depend on a cadre of administrators to help manage and lead colleges. These advisors who report to the dean – associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors – lead and manage essential functions in the college such as academic, financial and student services (Krahenbuhl, 2004). In many colleges, the dean and these administrators regularly meet as a senior leadership team. In my research, these teams assumed different monikers in different colleges such as the senior leadership team, the senior administrative team and the dean’s cabinet. Despite the prevalence of senior teams in colleges, the literature on deans offers surprisingly sparse insights about the relationship between deans and their senior teams, including how deans engage their senior teams to shape academic priorities or inform resource allocation.

Most research on academic deans does not even mention senior teams, let alone explore how deans engage college-level administrators such as associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors within team settings. Some research mentions these administrators, but only within the narrow context of delegating work. Montez, Wolverton and Gmelch (2003), for example, recommended that deans focus on their most

important responsibilities, delegating other work to “subordinates” such as assistant and associate deans and administrative directors. Similarly, Wolverton, Wolverton and Gmelch (1999) suggested that deans who wanted to continue conducting research could delegate work to assistant and associate deans. “This is not an easy task, but it can be accomplished if the dean builds an administrative team that understands, supports, and itself enlists in such activities” (p. 101). Research on deans, therefore, recommends that deans engage their senior teams for an entirely practical reason – economizing time.

The authors of practitioner guides for academic deans also advise them to engage their senior teams, but without explaining how or why deans should work with their associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors as individuals or as a team. In the first chapter of a handbook for deans, which was published by the American Conference of Academic Deans (2014), one former dean advised new deans to “build a strong team of assistant and associate deans” (p. 6). In the second chapter of the same handbook, another former dean recommended that new deans “be intentional about sharing authority and power,” emphasizing the importance of developing “strong working relationships with your subordinates (e.g., associate deans)” (American Conference of Academic Deans, 2014, p. 17). These recommendations are helpful, but offer no specific prescriptions for deans looking to engage their senior teams.

The observations of other former deans, however, begin to specify a rationale for why deans might engage their senior teams. Krahenbuhl (2004) stressed that meetings of the college’s administrative team should not only include the dissemination of information, but also feature discussion of important issues that help the dean develop a “better-informed sense of what might be possible” (p. 46). In these meetings, the dean

and the senior team should explore “richer perspectives on important questions and issues” and harness the team’s “collective intelligence” (Krahenbuhl, 2004, p. 46). Morris (1981) echoed similar themes in advising deans to consult individuals across the college. First, consultation stimulates discussion of potential solutions to problems. For this reason, he criticized deans who are “stingy” in exploring problems with their colleagues, arguing they begin to believe that “decisions can be endowed with wisdom from only one head – their own” (Morris, 1981, p. 150). Second, consultation is an “organization-building act”; deans generate “a genuine sense of involvement and participation” by inviting ideas from a range of individuals across the college (Morris, 1981, p. 150). Dill (1980) advocated a similar logic, instructing deans to “pull together a sense” of what everyone in the college has “come together to do” (p. 266).

These suggestions from former deans to solicit rich perspectives, capture collective knowledge and establish a sense of participation echo insights from research on the senior administrative teams of college and university presidents. In their research on presidents, Bensimon and Neumann (1993) identified three functions of presidential teams – utilitarian, expressive and cognitive. The utilitarian function entails presidents seeking information from their colleagues such as receiving progress reports. By requesting certain information, presidents also signal the institution’s most important objectives and pressing problems to their colleagues. In the words of one president, after meeting as a team, “everyone knows what is the most important driving force” for the institution (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 36).

Second, the expressive function reflects the “internal connectedness” of senior teams. This function includes two activities for members of the team – offering mutual

support to the president (and each other) and counseling the president. This counsel often assumes the form of offering “substantive, instrumental advice” to the president (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 39). A presidential team only realizes its expressive potential if presidents are willing to believe that “doing it all alone is impossible” and “rely strongly and openly on the team” (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 40).

Third, the cognitive function involves presidents and their senior teams engaging in “collective knowing.” It entails the senior team analyzing problems from multiple perspectives, keeping “their ear to the ground” across the institution and even questioning the president’s assertions and assumptions (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 43). “In its cognitive function the team is a brainlike social structure that enlarges the intelligence span of individual team members” (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 41). In essence, the senior team becomes “the sense maker” for the institution (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 41). They praised some teams for focusing more on ideas than tasks, including exploring how the team could address “problems that belong to all” (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 113). In his study of new college and university presidents, Smerek (2013) found that some presidential teams performed a similar function, observing “a process of collective meaning construction and response generation” (p. 385).

These recommendations for presidents, along with the suggestions of former deans, evoke several essential tenets of sensemaking in organizations. First, research on sensemaking suggests that managers assume an important role in establishing a shared sense of meaning across organizations (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al, 1994; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Smircich and Morgan (1982) argued, managers “frame and shape the context of action in such a way that the members of that context are able to use

the meaning thus created as a point of reference for their own action and understanding of the situation” (p. 261). In their study of a public research university, Gioia and colleagues (1991, 1994) described how senior administrators and members of a strategic planning committee tried to influence the sensemaking of individuals across campus, directing them toward adopting a preferred interpretation of the university’s vision – becoming a top-ten public research university – by devising this new vision, controlling the diffusion of information about this vision and creating forums across campus to discuss this vision.

This perspective also highlights the extent to which individuals expect senior managers to articulate a sense of shared purpose for their organization. Individuals look to managers for answers to the classic sensemaking adage, “What’s the story?” (Weick et al, 2005, p. 410) and the personal analogue of this concern, “How do I fit into the story?” (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011, p. 83). Maitlis (2005) explored the consequences of this expectation. In her study of symphony orchestras, she differentiated four forms of organizational sensemaking – guided, fragmented, restricted and minimal. These different forms are defined by differences in the extent to which leaders tried to “control” and “animate” sensemaking across their organizations. With guided sensemaking, managers regularly met with different groups of stakeholders about strategic issues. In these forums, managers disseminated information and discussed their own interpretations with other stakeholders. From these conversations, managers were able to integrate their own interpretations with those of other individuals to construct and promote a “unitary” narrative of strategic issues and “a common foundation for action” (Maitlis, 2005, p. 36).

While guided sensemaking featured high control and high animation, fragmented sensemaking was marked by low control and high animation. With fragmented

sensemaking, managers sought the perspectives of different stakeholders, but did not try to integrate everyone's perspectives into a coherent narrative. Although this approach stimulated multiple interpretations of issues, it failed to produce a common understanding of them. This absence of shared understanding ultimately frustrated attempts to address strategic issues across the studied orchestras. "The unreconciled multiple accounts constructed in fragmented processes resulted in actions that were rarely in harmony" (Maitlis, 2005, p. 39). Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) defined this sort of fissure as a "sensemaking gap" in organizations. In fragmented sensemaking, individuals diagnose an absence of shared purpose, but conclude that their managers are incapable of filling this void and developing a sufficient sense of direction (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p. 77).

Second, the literature on sensemaking in organizations increasingly conceives of sensemaking as a collective endeavor. This perspective underscores the social nature of sensemaking. The development of provisional understanding to guide and rationalize action is not exclusively an individual concoction, but something individuals construct together as "a collaborative activity" (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011). Gephart et al (2010) conceptualized sensemaking as an "ongoing process" that establishes "inter-subjective sense of shared meanings"; sensemaking in organizations transpires in "face to face settings where people seek to produce, negotiate, and maintain a shared sense of meaning" (pp. 284–285). Similarly, Stigliani and Ravasi (2012) argued that sensemaking in organizations often occurs in teams, referring to "collective sensemaking" as individuals exchanging "provisional understandings" and negotiating "consensual interpretations and a course of action" (p. 1232).

These recent articulations of sensemaking, along with the earlier observations of former deans and insights from research on the senior administrative teams of presidents, help to frame the findings of this chapter, which explore a phenomenon that emerged from interviews and observations during the annual budget review at Sprawling University – the extent to which the profiled academic deans leveraged authorship of the annual budget memo to establish a collective sense of academic priorities among their senior teams. As examined in Chapter 6, the deans who distributed authorship of the budget memo solicited advice from members of their senior teams both as individuals and as a team to explore academic priorities in their colleges. In contrast, the deans who dominated and delegated authorship did not engage their senior teams, deliberately constricting the number of administrators who informed the memo. The aforementioned insights from the literatures in higher education and sensemaking anticipate some reasons why deans might engage associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors in their colleges as individuals and as a team while authoring the budget memo. Moreover, these insights foretell potential problems that the deans who dominate and delegate authorship might encounter by electing not to engage their senior teams during the budget review. I explore both sets of consequences in the following section.

## **Findings**

### **Dean Swift**

#### *Generating New Ideas*

With his ethos of “cooking up” ideas, Dean Swift leverages the annual budget review as an opportunity to generate new ideas with the senior team. The team’s



discussion of the budget memo not only generates revisions for the memo, which “produces a better document,” but also stimulates discussion of new ideas for priorities. The dean proclaims, “we have lots of crazy ideas” while authoring the budget memo. “Some of [the ideas] we follow up on and ... turned out to be just great, unbelievable things ... Other things, we just dug a hole and buried it. It wasn't going to really work.” During meetings about the budget memo, the dean is not looking to define initiatives in great detail or arrive at “complete consensus.” Instead he is “looking for enthusiasm” across the team as they “bounce” ideas off of each other.

Dean Swift argues that his approach generates richer ideas for academic priorities. “Actually, I think it's best to run it the way I do, where everybody provides input”; by capturing “multiple voices,” the senior team can generate “more good ideas.” “[The budget memo] does include way more ideas than it would otherwise.” For this reason, he wants to keep “everything open” and let “everybody talk as much as they want.” By brainstorming ideas during the budget review, he hopes to generate new ideas that could benefit the college into the future. “I'm continually amazed that when you put a bunch of smart people together, and let the conversation almost freewheel, that how in almost every case, you end up with better answers and better solutions. I think that a person in my position should never be afraid to let that happen.”

Members of the senior team appreciate that the dean leverages meetings, including those about the budget memo, to explore nascent ideas in this fashion. One associate dean envisions the team's meetings as forums for “just trying to get very big concepts out there, flesh things out.” A different associate dean offered a similar depiction, describing these meetings as forums for “flushing things out.” “I think it's a

place for everyone to get a diverse set of opinions on what we should be doing and thinking about what our priorities should be.” Another associate dean describes the dean as “super willing to listen to new ideas,” which makes it “hard not to bring up new ideas” during the annual budget review. An administrative director echoes this theme, describing the senior team as a “sounding board” and explaining that members of the team “play off” of each other’s “energy” while “hatching plans” together.

During a meeting about the budget memo, the senior team decided to recast the college’s existing diversity efforts as a larger initiative and reexamine the college’s pilot initiatives with online education. The senior team’s discussion of increasing student diversity while crafting the budget memo demonstrates how Dean Swift leverages the budget review to generate new ideas for academic priorities. The dean initiated the discussion, which spanned 25 minutes, by asking the college’s director of student affairs if the college should “expand” its diversity efforts. The dean clearly values the college’s current programs, highlighting one in particular, saying, “It’s a very expensive program for us, but we do get some special students.” In response to several associate deans and administrative directors voicing enthusiasm for this program, the finance director asked everyone whether the team should submit a funding request to expand the program in the budget memo. The director of student affairs agreed, “I think so. I don’t think we have that money sitting around. And I also think it might work.” In response, Dean Swift added, “yeah, yeah,” saying, “I think it’s reasonable to put a request in the budget.”

With this preference in mind, the senior team began brainstorming ideas to include in the funding request. The discussion, which featured contributions from the dean, associate deans and administrative directors, referenced numerous aspects of the

college's efforts – expenditures for diversity programs, geographies from which to recruit students of color, campus visit days and various university and external scholarship programs. With an accumulating set of impressions, an associate dean shifted the focus of discussion, challenging the team to consider whether they could integrate the college's various efforts into a larger and more coherent diversity initiative. "So, I think this is wonderful. My suggestion is to create a positive slope on it. Propose something; perhaps a little bit more money ... Let's call it 'funding diversity initiative.'" The associate dean wanted the request to provide enough funds "to actually grow and try some things." "I think making it a deliberate ask would first of all be timely, but it could also be right ... I just really think this is one of those things that leaning forward is going to work." In response, another associate dean supported this idea, adding that another dimension of a larger initiative could be developing a stronger network for recruiting students of color.

Dean Swift quickly endorsed the idea of framing the college's diversity activities as a larger initiative. He began to integrate or "fold" everyone's ideas into a nascent summary to feature in the budget memo, mentioning expanding the existing recruiting programs and developing an alumni and community network, along with interjecting a preference for developing a more "continuous presence" in the lives of potential applicants. An associate dean suggested that certain program details or "hooks" might capture the attention of students of color, including creating an accelerated path to attaining both a bachelor's and master's degree. After the dean and others expressed enthusiasm for this idea, the associate dean volunteered to write some text to include with the funding request. The finance director then asked whether anyone else had other ideas, which prompted the dean to ask whether they should consider expanding the college's

summer camps. "I don't know if we've exhausted ideas for getting the right students here [on campus] in the summer." In response, the director of student affairs referenced a discussion with the college's marketing director, who was sitting across the conference table, about not only hosting camps on campus, but also offering camps across the state.

At this point, Dean Swift asked the finance director to clarify the parameters of the budget memo. "I don't know, how much space might we have to devote to this topic? Could we have a page? Or is that too much?" The finance director responded, "It depends on how many other things are in there," prompting laughter from the team. Once again, the dean reiterated support for submitting a funding request if they have "a solid enough idea." Dean Swift attempted to capture the emerging plan by summarizing everyone's suggestions, saying,

I don't know exactly how to put this. We're trying to get enough qualified applicants, and part of that involves our scouring the earth for the qualified applicants ... So, middle school and high school students. And then once we have enough qualified applicants, the other piece is do we have enough financial aid to bring in the people we want? Now, after that, making those people successful once they get here in a variety of ways. So, I think if we want to really flesh all of this out, there is no reason not to put it in the budget request.

In response, the finance director recommended mentioning the initiative in the memo's specific section on diversity while also including a more detailed summary of the proposed initiative as a funding request at the end of the memo. Members of the team agreed with this plan. Several associate deans applauded the suggestion of their colleague to articulate a broader diversity initiative in the budget memo.

Dean Swift closed this portion of discussion by articulating cautious optimism for the funding request. "Well, we have to see what's possible ... I don't want to be overly optimistic. On the other hand, we haven't really tried [an ambitious plan]. We haven't

given it the full effort." This vignette reveals how Dean Swift shaped academic priorities during the annual budget review, leveraging authorship of the budget memo as an opportunity to generate new ideas as a senior team. Within 25 minutes of brainstorming, the dean and the senior team had generated a new vision for the college's efforts to increase student diversity.

### *Affirming Commitments to Priorities*

Dean Swift believes that the senior team's collaborative process for authoring the budget memo generates a greater commitment to priorities. The team's discussion of the budget memo strengthens the team's belief that they are "on the same page" with the college's priorities. "People feel like they're involved, that they have input, their ideas are represented." The dean explains,

We all know each other really well. We all know what we're doing. We all know what the priorities are. We all know where we're pushing. But it's sort of an organized way, it's a touchpoint to say, 'Okay we worked on this document together and is everybody pretty happy with it?'"

Put another way, Dean Swift frames the process of authoring the budget memo as an annual "sanity check" for the senior team. For this reason, he believes that the annual budget review, particularly the process of crafting the budget memo, is "an absolutely necessary process" and "institutionally a good thing" because it requires deans to explore essential questions about their college during "good times and bad times."

Members of the senior team agree that authoring the budget memo together engenders a collective sense of priorities. One administrative director explains that some ideas make the budget memo, whereas others are tabled for future consideration or

discarded altogether. Dean Swift's approach, however, minimizes frustration over not pursuing some ideas. "This is where the dean does a very good job. It seems like we're doing whatever we want to do, because the things that come to the top of the list, that get done, seem to everybody to be what we want to do." By "vetting" ideas while drafting the memo, the senior team realizes, "we are doing the right things because we have come to identify these things as the right things." This administrator believes that the senior team is "on the same page" about the college's academic and fiscal priorities because Dean Swift "synthesizes a lot" from them during the annual budget review.

### *Showing Off the Senior Team*

By authoring the budget memo as a team, Dean Swift hopes to acknowledge associate deans and administrative directors for their work – not only among their colleagues on the team, but also among the university's senior leadership. "I think the person that answers the question [in the budget memo] ought to be the person that's most responsible for that program. I think they ought to get credit in the eyes of the provost." In part, the budget memo and the budget conference offer an opportunity to demonstrate that the college "really has its act together" to the provost. "It's just a chance ... to remind the provost's office that this place is really well-managed, is very innovative, is just really on a tear in terms of where we're going."

For this reason, Dean Swift invites all members of the senior team to attend the budget conference with the provost. "I think they ought to feel included – and that's the reason I bring the whole team." The dean knows he could answer most of the provost's questions. "I'll be honest, there aren't very many questions that get asked by the provost

or anybody else that I can't answer, because I'm in touch with every little aspect of the college.” But he wants the budget conference to be a celebration of the team’s expertise. “I'm very proud of the associate deans and of the staff. Frankly, I don't mind showing them off at all. We've got a bunch of articulate people with ideas that are going places and I think to have that group in a room, all at the same place at the same time, makes one heck of a impression.” He underscores this sense of pride in the senior team. “If anybody had any doubts, come to this meeting, and you can read the document, and you can ask any question you want, and there will be an immediate answer.” Dean Swift believes that members of the senior team look forward to the budget conference “because they come out feeling good” about their collective work.

### **Dean Austen**

#### *Celebrating Accomplishments*

Dean Austen frames authoring the budget memo as more than a bureaucratic task. It entails much more than reporting the college’s fiscal position and academic priorities to the provost’s office. First, she wants the process of authoring the budget memo to maximize the senior team’s “value-added time.” “For something that takes a lot of effort and energy, as this does, I really don’t look at it as a matter of compliance.” Instead the dean asks, ““what can we get out of this process?”” “Anything you are forced to spend time on that is material, you should try and get something out of it.” Without framing this deeper purpose, the dean worries that the budget review would waste the “very valuable time of our key people.”

Instead Dean Austen argues that engaging the senior team during the budget review helps to celebrate the college's accomplishments over the past year. "I use it as an occasion for people to be creative in expressing what they have done that is good." This purpose has proven particularly renewing to the senior team as the college emerges from fiscal crisis. The finance director echoes this purpose, asserting that the dean's approach demonstrates her respect for members of the senior team and her commitment to sharing credit for the college's turnaround. She insists on having the administrators in charge of initiatives "write their piece" for the memo.

### *Deepening Commitment to Priorities*

More importantly, Dean Austen argues that her inclusive approach to authoring the budget memo helps to deepen the senior team's commitment to the college's priorities. The team's discussion of the budget memo creates a rare "occasion" to "bring everyone together" to explicitly discuss priorities. She explains,

I can tell you what drives it, conceptually. There are really very few things that we own collectively. Very few, that we own really as a group. So, cognitively, I am always aware that when we have an occasion to reaffirm our collective ownership of those things, we should do it.

By debating, writing and editing the budget memo as a team, Dean Austen invites the senior team to test the extent to which everyone shares the same vision of the college's priorities. "Are we still on the same page with all this?" The process of authorship serves as an important "reality check" for the team, providing an occasion "to "think through" the college's priorities. The finance director believes the dean's approach helps to clarify



and reinforce the college's priorities across the senior team. "It's just better for all involved. We get a better end product."

Dean Austen has realized that engaging the senior team during the budget review requires a balance of exploring existing notions of priorities and avoiding mindless ratification of these impressions. The dean, for example, found the most recent budget review "as more of a confirmation," prompting her to reflect on her approach to authoring the budget memo. The dean and the senior team followed the same routine of earlier years; after outlining the memo with the finance director, it was "farmed out" to the associate deans for review. "It was prepared. It was sent to everybody. People gave minor comments to the finance director." The senior team also met to discuss the draft memo. "People had some issues, and then they thought about a few other minor comments, and then it was submitted and circulated again to everybody."

Upon reflection, Dean Austen worried that the team's discussion was too perfunctory. "I reflected on this ... I thought 'shouldn't that have been a deeper meeting?'" Ultimately, she realized that the team's swift authorship of the memo reflected the regularity with which they discuss the college's priorities. "I thought, but, wait a minute, everything in [the memo] is stuff that we are talking about *all* the time. This is not like, 'Oh, goals, objectives, what are they? Oh, we have to come up with some.' No, we have them. We are talking about them continually." By the time the senior team meets to discuss the budget memo, the associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors are exploring familiar territory – discussing and tweaking the college's priorities. "We didn't have any big deep debates, but we shouldn't be having big debates about this stuff. This is stuff we have already agreed to, and are working on."

## Dean Huxley

### *Clarifying the College's Priorities*

Dean Huxley believes that his collaborative approach to authoring the budget memo clarifies the college's priorities for himself and members of the senior team. "I really think that there's a big benefit to everybody in that group hearing these conversations ... in just getting the group on the same page and being aware of what the strategic priorities are." By drafting the budget memo as a team, the dean and the senior team revisit the question of "what's driving the college?" The dean senses that the associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors want to "solve problems or brainstorm," "create ideas" and "grapple with the issues" during the budget review. "It's a great opportunity for everybody to do that."

An associate dean echoes the dean's assessment, arguing that authoring the budget memo as a team helps to clarify the college's priorities. The process of discussing the budget memo and preparing for the budget conference forces the senior team to "think about our priorities." "Having gone through the budget review, which is very intense, it gave me a clear sense of what I thought about the future, too, and helped me hear what was coming out from [other associate deans] and sifted into certain siloes or buckets." For this administrator, these discussions also helped the senior team "understand how to move forward" with formulating a plan for implementing priorities. "It's helpful to us because, to me it's not ... yes, it's about the priorities, figuring out your priorities, but it's also about how do you set about achieving them or fulfilling them."

## **Dean Joyce**

### *Devising the Best Priorities*

To stimulate discussion of priorities, Dean Joyce has tried to create a space in which “smart people” can collaborate to advance the college’s mission. “When I go into these meetings [about strategic investments], we've got challenges, we've got problems, we've got opportunities. I want us to come up with the best way to move forward.” Yet the dean remains “pretty agnostic about what [the answer] is.” During debates of strategic investments, the dean focuses on listening to his colleagues. “I didn't usually feel like I had an end game in mind at the beginning of each meeting ... It was really, ‘let's see where it goes. We're exploring here.’”

During the budget review, Dean Joyce and the senior team examined and debated numerous potential strategic investments. In the budget memo, they profiled several initiatives, including stimulating faculty research and expanding international experiences for students. The larger initiative for stimulating faculty research emerged from several proposals for strategic investments, including providing incentives for tenured faculty to apply for large research grants and subsidizing a sabbatical period for pre-tenure faculty. During one meeting in advance of submitting the budget memo, the senior team debated whether they should consider pre-tenure sabbaticals as a component of an initiative to stimulate faculty research. This discussion demonstrates the openness in which Dean Joyce and members of his senior team explored academic priorities during the annual budget review.

This discussion, which lasted over 16 minutes, emerged from Dean Joyce, an associate dean and an assistant dean observing that several of the initial proposals for

strategic investments shared a common objective – stimulating faculty research. The finance director suggested focusing the conversation on pre-tenure sabbaticals, arguing that the college’s main competitors were already offering this benefit to new faculty. An associate dean quickly supported this recommendation – “you get through the third-year review and you want to accelerate your tenure case, you really want to push through with flying colors” – but also clarified that the college was only offering “lump sums” to new faculty, which they could use “to achieve the effect of the pre-tenure sabbatical.” This administrator also argued that the college loses its investment when professors do not receive tenure or are not productive after attaining it. “That’s a huge investment that we have just blown; a half of million dollars, or something like that, which walks out the door if someone doesn’t get tenure ... we blow something close to probably a \$9 to \$12 million investment if people can’t be productive post-tenure.”

In response, an assistant dean questioned whether offering a pre-tenure sabbatical would undermine efforts to socialize new faculty into their teaching and service responsibilities. “Having someone somewhat step away from their community when they are still very new and you’re trying to build norms and expectations with what their load is going to be ... they have to be ready at some point.” The associate dean championing the proposal interjected that a sabbatical might not even improve the chances that some faculty receive tenure. “They may already be on a trajectory where they are not going to get tenure. So, to give it to everybody, you could be throwing good money after bad.”

Another associate dean offered a different reason for offering a pre-tenure sabbatical. Instead of framing the benefit as bolstering the tenure prospects of junior faculty, this associate dean emphasized that the initiative could increase the productivity

of associate professors after receiving tenure. “Putting it a little bit differently ... the cultivating function ... get the weeds out of the garden. And the question, the question that I think we have to ask ourselves is what’s likely to lead to the healthiest plants post-tenure? That’s where the real pay-off is, right?” After uttering “uh-hum,” the championing associate dean responded, “[a pre-tenure course buyout is] the one thing if I had a wand and could confer upon [junior faculty], they would accept immediately, and they look upon their colleagues who have achieved these buyouts with some amount of both respect and envy.” Dean Joyce, who had not spoken, echoed this point, saying, “They pursue the possibility of course buyout at every chance.”

With support for a pre-tenure sabbatical beginning to accumulate, an assistant dean reiterated the earlier concern for privileging research over teaching. “It’s very critical for our students to have this, these faculty in the classroom. So I worry about that culture of how many course buyouts can I get.” Dean Joyce, who had remained silent throughout most of this discussion, interjected that he held a similar concern. “It does bother me that our culture fosters a default perspective in a very high fraction of our junior faculty, if not in all of them, that teaching is to be avoided at all costs ... Teaching is not a plus; it’s a necessary evil. I think it’s a bad culture.” Despite this apprehension, the dean endorsed offering some sort of pre-tenure sabbatical to lure faculty recruits. “This is not a Sprawling culture. This is the culture for top research universities. So, I am not as convinced on the [faculty] grants by the argument that they may not get tenure and we would have wasted our investment ... What I am concerned about is getting the good people here in the first place.” This discussion not only generated ideas for the budget memo, specifically clarifying the content of a larger initiative to stimulate faculty

research, but also stimulated consideration of accompanying issues such as the college's tenure rate and the research productivity of associate professors.

Dean Joyce and members of the senior team explored numerous other opportunities in advance of submitting the annual budget memo. During one meeting, they examined a potential investment that was ultimately rejected by the senior team – creating a new scholarship program for master's students. The champion of the proposal, an assistant dean, argued that offering new scholarships would not only increase the quality of the master's cohort, but also improve the college's pipeline for doctoral applicants. “This all goes to trying to infuse our master's cohort with a little bit more of the top-quality students, which would hopefully become a bit of a snowball effect in the program and in the actual future recruiting.” Over 20 minutes, the senior team explored this problem of losing top master's applicants to several competitors. The dean and the senior team acknowledged that the college's funding package for master's students was not as competitive as those offered by several elite peer institutions. One associate dean captured the team's belief, saying, “The configuration of our financial package is less desirable than the configuration of some competitors.” Dean Joyce echoed this assessment, arguing, “We're definitely hurting ourselves for the very top students.”

There was less agreement, however, about whether offering the scholarships would actually yield the college better applicants. One associate dean asked, “I don't have the data, so I don't know how much people are doing horse-trading on the financial package, but is there any amount of money that we could put on the table that would make someone who got admitted to [peer competitor] come here?” Dean Joyce voiced both tempered enthusiasm and caution for the proposal. “There could be big spillovers,

getting four really great students infused into the master's student body could strengthen the whole program in a way that pays off for itself." But he also conceded that the program would concentrate "a lot of money" on only "very few students."

The turning point in the discussion came once Dean Joyce asked an associate dean who had extensive experience teaching master's courses to assess the problem. In response, the associate dean argued that the faculty was less worried about attracting the best master's students and more interested in jettisoning the worst students. "They complain about the bottom of the master's pool, they don't talk very much about the top of it." Instead this associate dean offered an alternative solution for improving the master's cohort – increase selectivity in admissions. "What they can live with is, is not the top 15 percent being absent. What they can't live with is ... the bottom 15 percent being here."

In response, Dean Joyce extracted his impression of the team's assessment of the scholarship proposal. "Okay, so I guess now I am starting to hear what sounds to me to be an emerging consensus that spending this much money on [scholarships for master's students] may not have that great of bang for the buck where we need it." He added, "The issue of improving student quality is not to increase the number of [master's] researchers, it's to improve the quality in the classroom." In response, members of the senior team offered some immediate ideas for improving the quality of the master's cohort, including admitting fewer students and enhancing services to support international students. This discussion, along with the earlier instance of generating ideas for developing a pre-tenure sabbatical, demonstrates how Dean Joyce led the college's senior team in an open

exploration of issues in hopes of constructing and articulating some sense of collective understanding of the college's academic priorities during the annual budget review.

Dean Joyce clearly looks to, and depends on, members of the senior team to help him define the college's priorities. "I usually had some ideas in mind about things that I cared about driven by the overall mission for the college, but I don't feel like it's my job or that I need to deliver all of the ideas." Instead he wants the senior team to explore their collective ideas for improving the college. "I think that I don't need to feel like I'm doing everything anymore. What I really want to come out of the executive team, the [senior] team, is the best decisions for the college." By engaging the senior team, the dean hopes to formulate the best set of priorities for the college. "That's my goal, really that we get to the best decisions and set the best priorities." An associate dean believes that the dean wants the team's advice – both as individuals and as a group. "I think [the dean] really believes that the team that reports to him can provide him with useful insight and advice. I think his objective was to get as much of that as he could."

### **Dean Stowe**

#### *Engaging Faculty after the Budget Conference*

Despite authoring the budget memo without input from most administrators in the college, Dean Stowe discusses the college's budget with administrators and faculty *after* the budget conference. "I actually talk to people about [the budget] after [the budget conference] because I can change it." Although she submits the budget memo to the provost's office, Dean Stowe frames the document as her "script" for discussing the college's academic and fiscal priorities with the faculty. "Well, I'm actually writing [the



memo] for the faculty ... I need it to be coherent for the provost, I need it to match my budget, but I really need it to be clear and in line for the faculty.”

With this perspective, Dean Stowe presents the memo’s main points during a faculty meeting every spring. She summarizes “what’s roughly in the memo,” including the college’s financial position, rather than discussing specific financial or programmatic details. While addressing the faculty, she frames the budget memo as her “current state of assumption” about “where we’re going” as a college. “I present the overall budget, my sense of the status of the college, what we spent money on, where we're going and over the next five years.” But the dean stresses that the memo does not constitute the college’s actual budget. “I do try to present what I think is likely to happen, but it’s not a binding document. It’s not like when [the faculty] look at it and they say, ‘[she] says we’re going to do this that means we can’t do that and this other thing’ ... that’s not what it means.”

During this faculty meeting, Dean Stowe not only “reports out” on the budget, but also solicits feedback on her vision for resource allocation and academic priorities. “I do try to have a pretty open budget conference every year with the faculty. I take input and I make changes according to that.” The dean values the faculty’s feedback, even if it means reconsidering her plans for the upcoming year. “I take in comments and most years, there's been some disagreement. Not disagreement, but ... now that we're thinking about it, we actually wish we were going in this direction rather than that direction or certain area and we make adjustments at that point.”

The college’s recent plan for faculty hiring, for example, emerged from this budget discussion with the faculty. In the budget memo, Dean Stowe had projected numerous faculty hires over several years; and during the budget discussion with faculty,

she proposed conducting searches every year for several years to make these hires. In response, some faculty articulated an alternative approach – concentrate hiring efforts every other year. “We had the budget meeting and we talked some more about needs, and the faculty said they'd rather really concentrate on a search this year. We had a lot of needs and they thought this was the year to do it.” An associate dean believes that this discussion revealed the faculty’s interest in shaping the college’s priorities. “The issue was, should we be putting our eggs in various baskets to get some representation of social problems here that we think are meaningful to [the college]?” Despite proposing a different plan, Dean Stowe adopted the faculty’s recommendation for the faculty searches, which proved “wildly successful.” “We've actually had more of a rhythm, which will continue now, having a major hiring year and then a year without a search.”

#### *Underestimating Interest in the Budget Memo*

Despite the fruits of this annual meeting with the faculty, Dean Stowe does not believe that administrators and faculty want to know about the budget in detail. This perception reinforces her choice to exclude most administrators from authorship of the budget memo. “I walk people through [the memo] and that seems to be what people wanted. They didn’t need more that.” Unlike her predecessor, Dean Stowe invites faculty, administrators and staff to peruse a copy of the budget memo in the dean’s office. “I don't actually send out the document, but there's a public copy ... there's a copy to all faculty that’s available.” But “only a few” administrators and faculty “actually want to read the whole thing.” “Nobody ever comes and sees [the memo]. The details are boring.”

Some administrators, however, want to shape the budget memo and learn more about the college's budget. Dean Stowe's exclusion of the senior team during the annual budget review conjures previous resentments of her predecessor. An associate dean, for example, strikes a common chord in describing the previous dean as secretive. "[The previous dean] kept things close to her chest and people didn't know much about anything. And if you pushed, you got your toes stepped on ... people stayed clear." Dean Stowe's arrival offered hope for increased fiscal transparency. "It felt with [Dean Stowe] that we might actually be able to know more about the finances." Members of the senior team hoped to ask more questions about the budget. "People wanted to know, 'How are things spent now?'"

Despite this initial optimism, most administrators are excluded from the budget review, which frustrates some associate deans. One associate dean describes having "zero" involvement in drafting the budget memo; this administrator does not even have a chance to review the memo before its submission to the provost's office. Instead this associate dean learns about its contents during the dean's annual meeting with the faculty. "I've never had any – I don't know who [the dean] deals with. I know she deals with our finance person ... but she didn't deal with me." This administrator expresses obvious frustration, not having "a better window" into the college's budget priorities than other faculty in the college, despite her administrative responsibilities. "To what better window do I have? I mean, she doesn't talk to me about the budget." This associate dean, for example, has learned about Dean Stowe's signature initiative, the centers of excellence, by participating in them as a professor rather than by planning them with the dean.

Another associate dean who was excluded from the budget review expressed similar frustrations. This administrator has concluded that Dean Stowe does not want to “think together” about the college’s budget or its academic priorities. She has “serious problems” with “delegating,” which explains her reluctance to “[get] work done through others.” “My observations about the dean is that [Dean Stowe] really still essentially thinks of herself as a faculty member. Just a really big faculty member, not a highly paid executive in a complicated system.” The dean’s decision to exclude administrators during the budget review complicates discussions throughout the college about funding academic initiatives. “I’ll be sitting in meetings and people will say, ‘Well I think we ought to do this that or the other thing’ and I’m sitting there saying, ‘Do you know what that’s going to actually cost?’”

Moreover, this administrator thinks that Dean Stowe has missed opportunities to clarify the purpose of the centers of excellence, prompting some confusion because faculty had already established versions of these groups before her arrival. “We already had centers of excellence ... really the only difference was that they became slightly formalized and got a budget and had some scholarships.” For this administrator, and some faculty colleagues, questions remain about the purpose of the centers of excellence; there has been “a considerable amount of circularity” about their criteria during discussions with the faculty.

## Dean Conrad

### *Failing to Articulate Priorities*

Members of the college's senior team express fondness for the dean. They clearly respect his generosity and intelligence. One associate dean calls Dean Conrad "a visionary," describing his vision as "innovative" and "cutting edge." Similarly, the finance director characterizes the dean as "a very smart man" who has formulated a "fascinating" vision of "science and research." Another associate dean echoes these depictions, calling the dean "an incredible visionary."

These same colleagues, however, criticize Dean Conrad for not translating his vision into tangible academic priorities for the college. One associate dean explains that the college continually confronts "a fork in the road" due to "a lack of prioritization." "There's a gap between the vision and how we make decisions." Another associate dean concurs, arguing that the dean struggles with implementation, explaining,

I've told the provost this. I said visionaries are a dime a dozen. It's easy to have a vision. It's about implementing. It's about making things happen. He is not good at process. He's not a detail person. Now, I find that amazing [because of his disciplinary training], because when he's focused on [research], he is incredibly focused and detail oriented to the extreme. But when it's other things in life ... he doesn't know how to get things done.

The finance director expresses a similar frustration. "[The dean's vision] is more of the blue-sky stuff. He's in a different realm, right? He doesn't come down." One associate dean has even concluded that Dean Conrad "probably should have never been a dean."

The annual budget review stokes these frustrations for members of the senior team. It serves as an annual reminder of the void between academic and fiscal planning in the college. One administrator expressed her frustration, saying, "I just throw my hands

in the air.” “There are no priorities ... there are *no* priorities.” An associate dean argued that the budget review exposes the college’s lack of direction, saying,

We have not established priorities. We don't have a strategic plan, so we don't have any decision process that drives how we spend our money ... what we desperately need is a strategic plan so we can make educated decisions on what it is we need to be committing resources to and what do we need to stop doing.

Similarly, another associate dean lamented the lack of planning in the college. “What we're hearing is ‘yes’ to everything, but we can't do everything ... We're everything to everybody.” Her frustration devolves into exasperation. “It's too loosey-goosey. It's all pie in the sky ... We have limited resources, so what are our priorities? Is this something we're going to go for or is it not? ... What is the guideline? There's no hard data and guidelines to make decisions.”

In fact, the associate deans have come to realize that the college does not adhere to a budget. One associate dean claims that the college’s approach to resource allocation embodies the adage “the squeaky wheel gets the oil.” One of the administrators who writes the budget memo confesses, “we don’t really have a budget.” Instead the budget memo is “basically a rollover” of “legacy numbers”; it reflects the past much more than anticipates the future. “It really reflects history. It doesn't reflect what's new or where we're going. That's the really unfortunate part.” A different administrator critiques the haphazard nature of expenditures in the college. “What happens is whatever people want tends to be. ‘Okay, you can have that.’” An associate dean levels a similar concern over resource allocation. “*What* process? There is no process that I know of.”

The deficit in the dean’s office, therefore, is not surprising to those who draft the budget memo. One administrator frames the deficit as the consequence of allocating

resources without any planning. “No regards for the fact that we didn't have the money ... we're distributing funds in a way like ‘oh yeah, you can have more faculty’ or ‘you can have this.’” Another administrator echoes this concern. “There's not an unlimited pot of money. We can't keep hiring people because we can't afford it. Things just don't work that way. It is a business. Luckily, most colleges don't go into receivership and their belongings aren't sold off.” This administrator levels a biting indictment of the college, admitting, “If we were a business, it'd be sad. I wouldn't invest in us.”

### *Seeking Clarity over Priorities*

The failure to set priorities has created a “problem with transparency” in the college. As a professor, one associate dean had assumed that Dean Conrad followed a strategic plan to allocate resources. “I assumed the people that I worked with, like the dean and all the other [associate] deans, they knew more than I did about running the business of the [college].” Yet this associate dean now knows better, questioning the rationale behind expenditures. “Either there's a problem with they're not following business practice and don't have a strategic plan and don't make decisions based on priorities. Or they're not sharing it.” This administrator especially criticizes the dean for not even discussing the budget memo with the senior team. “I'm part of the senior team, and I don't know what [the budget] is.”

Another associate dean describes this lack of transparency. Dean Conrad does not distribute the budget memo; “it is not pushed” to the senior team. “Here in this college, in a number of ways, there's been less sharing of central items back with the senior team.” The dean has always been willing to discuss the budget, and the budget memo, but only

upon explicit request. “If I wanted, I have asked for it, they give it to me.” Moreover, this associate dean argues that the senior team never receives a balanced perspective on the college’s budget. The finance director mentions very specific budget figures and the dean offers “general thoughts” about broader economic and political trends, but no one describes the “middle ground” at “the intersection” of these broader trends and specific details, including funding priorities for the college.

To offset this vacuum, several associate deans have created strategic plans to define priorities within their spheres of responsibility. One associate dean explains, “We want to improve the services we provide our students. We want to improve the services we provide our faculty. We can be very concrete about that.” Yet to answer important questions for her unit, this administrator needs more detailed information about the college’s long-term plans. “Unless we know where the college’s going, do we grow, for example, [this] program or do we say we want to phase out and move over with the [another college on campus]?” The associate dean argues, “it’s very difficult” to create “a strategic plan with my own department in a vacuum of where’s the college going.”

Within this void, individuals across the college conjure their own explanations for the allocation of resources. Rumors often color interpretations. Some administrators, for example, contend that Dean Conrad rewards his “favorites” on the faculty, especially the department chairs. One associate dean describes this speculation, saying,

You hear how I go and get funds. Everyone does it that way, and then if you're like, ‘Well, then they got money for that. Well, how did they get money for that? Well, I asked for this, and they said no, we couldn't do it.’ It creates tension because it's not clear as to how decisions are made ... there's a lack of clarity.



This confusion creates opportunities for rumors to proliferate throughout the college.

“People make up stories in their head to explain what they're seeing because they don't know – it's not clear,” according to an associate dean.

Worse yet, the dean's penchant for agreeing to allocate funds without informing other administrators exacerbates confusion over resource allocation. The finance director notes that requests for funds often originate as verbal requests and rarely include a paper trail; department chairs often just stop her in the hallway or swing by her office to announce funding pledges from the dean. “Nobody puts things on paper; everything is done verbally ... I want a formal request, I want an explanation. I want something I can reference.” An associate dean echoes this frustration. “I spend a lot of time with [the dean] trying to undo some of this stuff, trying to sort it out. ” This administrator explains,

One of the things that I've told the department chairs, because they were all meeting with him on a regular basis and then they would tell me, ‘Well, [the dean] promised this," or ‘[the dean] promised that.’ I'd say, ‘Well, who knows about it?’ They said, ‘Well, [the dean] and I talked about it.’ I said, ‘You know, if a bear does something in the woods and there's no one there to see it, he probably didn't make a sound.’ I would tell them, ‘If you have a meeting with him and you come to some agreement, put it in an email and send it back to him and say, This is what I believe we talked about. CC me, okay. Then, I can follow up with him.’

This dilemma is “very frustrating,” especially when pledges for funding are revealed during the budget review. Faculty, especially department chairs, will secure resources from Dean Conrad that “nobody else knows about it.” “Money gets committed and nobody knows,” which forces this administrator to “always” be “playing catch up” to understand fiscal commitments made by the dean while preparing the budget memo.

One of the associate deans argues that Dean Conrad could alleviate some of this confusion by simply distributing the budget memo across the senior team. Members of

the team might better understand how their work advances the college's mission after reading the budget memo; it might help administrators "understand that I'm going to do this, but I'm not going to do this." "I always learn a lot that I didn't know from reading [the budget memo], and I probably understand what my part is in this whole administration." Without a strategic plan, this associate dean considers the budget memo as a close proxy. "Well, the annual budget report ... really gives a narrative strategic plan for the next year for the college ... It may not be the plan that's internally in the college, but it is sure what the dean, associate dean and our finance person are looking at."

Another associate dean, however, doubts that Dean Conrad will ever engage the senior team during the budget review. He likely excludes most of the team because seeking their advice would expose the obvious and overdue need to clarify priorities within the college. "The budget process needs to start with the strategic plan and then we have to decide, where are we putting our resources and that's where you need the input, and how are we doing? By the time we get to the [budget memo], it's a dead horse." It is simply "too late" to engage the senior team at that point. The problem is not "well, gee, I want to be involved in writing the report," but rather that the dean has never initiated an "ongoing process" of exploring the college's priorities.

Some members of the senior team argue that the chasm between academic and financial planning has stagnated the college's progress. An associate dean characterizes the dean's inability to set priorities as a "missed opportunity," explaining,

It is somewhat bittersweet ... I mean, we've got wonderful faculty, fantastic students, so much potential. There's no other place I'd rather be ... If only [the dean] had those skills to do the strategic planning, to stand up and be decisive and not be afraid of dissent, but also own the decisions and lay the ground rules as far as how we would all work together, I think we could be even greater, and that there is some sadness with that.

For other members of the team, the dean's shortcomings would prove less frustrating if he empowered the associate deans to advance some version of his vision, especially if the dean facilitated collaboration between the associate deans and chairs. One associate dean faults the dean for not empowering the senior team to make his vision "happen." "The rest of us have to make it happen. That's our job, but we don't really have that." Another associate dean offers a similar assessment. "He would be best to be a sage and say, 'these are my ideas, now somebody else take them and run with them.'"

### **Chapter Discussion**

This chapter probed the central theme of this dissertation – how academic deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review. All of the profiled deans who distributed authorship aimed to establish some collective sense of the college's academic priorities during the budget review. These deans did not frame authoring the budget memo as a check-the-box task to complete for the provost. Instead the budget review offered deans and their senior teams an opportunity to develop a clearer sense of academic priorities and rally around them. In contrast, the two deans who did not distribute authorship believed that their colleagues were either ambivalent about the content of the budget memo or already understood the college's priorities. In the

following discussion, I summarize the primary consequences of adopting these inclusive and exclusive approaches to authoring the budget memo.

### **Crafting a Collective Sense of Priorities**

The deans who distribute authorship of the budget memo established a collective sense of academic priorities during the annual budget review in three key ways. First, several of these deans, Dean Joyce and Dean Swift, leveraged the budget review to generate and refine new ideas for academic priorities. These deans used meetings about authorship of the budget memo to craft clearer and richer interpretations of issues and opportunities by harnessing the collective expertise of their senior teams. These deans hoped to capture a richer understanding of priorities by consulting their senior teams, despite having a comprehensive perspective on many issues and problems. During meetings, deans and their senior teams would begin to translate circumstances in their colleges into clearer situations, which in turn emerged into nascent notions of priorities. Dean Joyce and Dean Swift framed authorship of the annual budget memo as an opportunity not only to develop new academic priorities for their colleges, but also recast existing priorities. For these two deans and their senior teams, discussion of academic priorities during the budget review often constituted a form of collective sensemaking.

This collective approach describes how Dean Swift and Dean Joyce shape academic priorities during the annual budget review. During a meeting about the budget memo, for example, Dean Swift marshals the collective experience of associate deans and administrative directors to recast the college's initiatives for increasing student diversity. A question of whether to mention the college's diversity efforts in the budget memo

stimulates a dynamic and rich conversation that culminates in a new approach for conceptualizing the college's diversity efforts. Similarly, Dean Joyce leverages the expertise of his senior team to explore potential strategic investments for the college. In advance of submitting the budget memo, the dean and members of the senior team explored a series of potential strategic investments, debating their merits as a team and electing as a team to prioritize initiatives for stimulating faculty research and increasing international experiences for students.

The collective sensemaking of these senior administrative featured several notable characteristics. First, these deans facilitated discussions that assumed an unbounded, even messy character, as senior teams sketched out priorities. At times, discussions snowballed; an idea would bounce around a conference table and accumulate richness. Other times, a member of the senior team would veer discussion in a different direction. The discussion of diversity initiatives in Dean Swift's college and pre-tenure sabbaticals in Dean Joyce's college featured both forms of this unbounded character. By facilitating dynamic dialogue, these deans stimulated a collective exploration in which they and members of their senior teams constructed more coherent interpretations of academic priorities.

Second, these discussions featured several temporal orientations as deans and members of their senior team explored the meaning of academic priorities. At times, the teams evaluated the meaning of their college's history with an issue or problem. In Dean Swift's college, for example, members of the senior team discussed outcomes of existing diversity initiatives while determining whether to reference increasing diversity as a priority in the budget memo. In Dean Joyce's college, members of the senior team

examined the college's experience with losing top-rated faculty recruits while exploring the merits of designing pre-tenure sabbaticals as a potential strategic investment; and they discussed the faculty's impressions of the master's cohort while debating whether to offer a scholarship for top master's applicants. Other times, discussions featured future-perfect references as deans and members of their senior teams imagined future states in their colleges. Dean Swift, for example, assembled everyone's impressions into an outline of the college's future diversity initiative. In Dean Joyce's college, one of the associate deans recast the senior team's consideration of stimulating faculty research in the future, speculating about the incentives that would best promote the productivity of associate professors. By glancing backwards toward the past – what is the college's experience with this issue? – and peering forward into the future – how might we approach this issue in the future? – deans, associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors collectively sketched academic priorities for their colleges.

Third, while discussions of senior teams assumed an unbounded character, Dean Joyce and Dean Swift seized opportunities to articulate some emergent or provisional sense of the team's shared understanding of academic priorities. Discussion might flow for minutes on end without contribution or interruption from these deans; they seemed to avoid anchoring discussions of their senior teams in their own impressions. But these deans would eventually interject to extract and articulate their emerging sense academic priorities. These deans were also willing to voice uncertainty about academic priorities; they did not necessarily have a clear sense of priorities before exploring ideas with members of the senior team.

In addition to leveraging the budget review to generate and refine new ideas for academic priorities, the deans who distribute authorship of the budget memo leveraged the annual budget review to deepen commitments to academic priorities among members of their senior teams. The collective approach to authorship helps deans and members of their senior teams to feel more connected to academic priorities in their colleges. Dean Swift describes the budget review as a “touchpoint” and “sanity check” to ensure that he and members of the senior team are “on the same page” about the college’s priorities. Dean Austen presents a similar logic, arguing that the budget review offers a rare opportunity to “bring everyone together” to “reaffirm” the “collective ownership” of priorities. Dean Huxley cites the benefits of exploring “what’s driving the college” as a team. Dean Austen and Dean Huxley also echo the importance of discussing the budget memo to get their senior teams “on the same page” about the college’s priorities. By discussing and debating priorities while authoring the annual budget memo, these deans and their senior teams engendered a deeper commitment to academic priorities.

Third, some of these deans emphasized that distributing authorship of the budget memo created an opportunity to celebrate the college’s accomplishments among members of the senior team. Dean Austen leverages the annual budget review to highlight the college’s progress out of fiscal crisis. Amidst a context of constrained resources, members of the senior team have persevered to clarify and advance the college’s academic mission. Dean Swift uses the annual budget review as an opportunity to celebrate the work of the college’s senior team. The budget conference serves as an occasion for members of the senior team to showcase their expertise to the provost and other administrators in the provost’s office. For Dean Swift, this performance not only

inspires the provost's confidence, but also energizes members of the senior team about the future of the college and the sense of camaraderie across the team. This sense of celebration and renewal serves as a reminder for deans; amidst countless daily dilemmas, it is important to celebrate the more enduring triumphs of their colleges.

### **Enabling Sensemaking Gaps Across Senior Teams**

The profiled deans who adopted exclusive approaches to authorship – Dean Conrad and Dean Stowe – still shape academic priorities during the annual budget review, even if they do not leverage authorship of the annual budget memo to establish some collective sense of priorities. They shape priorities in a more constricted sense. Dean Stowe not only codifies existing initiatives in the college by describing them in the budget memo, but also seeks feedback on her priorities for the college by meeting with the faculty after the budget conference with the provost. The faculty, including the associate deans, might not inform the development of academic priorities during the budget review, but they claim some say in the implementation of priorities. Dean Conrad shapes academic priorities during the budget review, but in a more passive fashion. By asking administrators who draft the budget memo to include certain priorities such as multidisciplinary curriculum, the dean underscores the importance of the college's most recent significant initiative.

In adopting these more exclusive approaches to authorship, however, Dean Conrad and Dean Stowe have alienated members of their senior team. The reactions of associate deans and administrative directors in these colleges illustrate the perils of not establishing some collective sense of academic priorities – whether during the budget



review or at other times. The reactions of associate deans in the colleges of Dean Stowe and Dean Conrad strike a tone of anxiety, confusion and frustration over academic priorities because these deans have chosen not to chart a common sense of purpose for their senior teams.

In this chapter, the consequences of these two deans abandoning their espoused commitment to collaboration and consultation come to fruition. Despite espousing a philosophy of synthesizing “the truth” from multiple voices while shaping academic priorities, Dean Stowe dismisses the potential benefits of engaging the senior team during the budget review. She wants to save members of the senior team from the hassle of drafting the budget memo, but she frustrates associate deans by excluding them. They want to inform how the college allocates its resources and better understand the dean’s own perspective on the college’s academic priorities. These associate deans, for example, are responsible for initiatives that are referenced in the budget memo, but feel little influence over how these activities are articulated as priorities to the provost’s office. The consequences of this exclusion extend beyond engendering hard feelings with the dean; these administrators express confusion over the college’s priorities and frustration over feeling disconnected from the dean’s vision for the college.

Worse yet, the associate deans in Dean Conrad’s college describe a more frustrating situation. Instead of offering an annual opportunity to affirm or renew the college’s priorities, the budget review reminds them how much the dean has ignored academic and financial planning. The associate deans describe an absence of opportunities to discuss the college’s academic priorities, despite the dean’s espousal of “open dialogue.” With Dean Conrad offering a minimal sense of the college’s priorities

beyond emphasizing research, associate deans find themselves questioning the rationale for expenditures – and even constructing stories to explain the dean’s decisions. Some of these associate deans have enacted some sense of control by drafting strategic plans for their spheres of responsibility, but acknowledge that these efforts have limits due to the broader lack of prioritization across the college. In both of these colleges, an absence of shared understanding has created sensemaking gaps on the senior teams. Moreover, members of senior teams have not only diagnosed an absence of shared purpose, but also realized that their deans might be incapable of articulating this sense of direction.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

My findings in this chapter advance the literature in higher education in four important ways. First, my findings illustrate that academic deans often depend on their senior administrative teams to fulfill one of their most important responsibilities – formulating academic priorities. Associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors can prove indispensable in helping deans develop the academic priorities of their colleges; these administrators are assisting their deans well beyond helping them to economize time through delegation, which has been the main inference of past research. It seems impossible, for example, to describe Dean Swift’s approach to shaping academic priorities during (and beyond) the budget review without considering how he engages the college’s senior team.

Second, my findings begin to specify the reasons why academic deans engage their senior teams to shape academic priorities. The deans who distribute authorship of the budget memo want to generate richer accounts of their college’s academic priorities,

deepen commitments to these priorities among members of their senior teams and celebrate the college's accomplishments. These insights deepen our understanding of why senior academic administrators engage their senior teams, extending earlier insights on the senior teams of college and university presidents (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Smerek, 2013). Moreover, I begin to specify the anger, confusion and frustration that stems from deans excluding members of their senior teams from critical work such as shaping academic priorities and articulating the college's academic and fiscal priorities during the annual budget review. This collective approach to shaping academic priorities, especially during annual budget reviews, might become even more important in the coming years as colleges, and their deans and senior teams, continue to adjust to uncertain fiscal and political environments (as explained in Chapter 1).

Third, my findings reveal several unexplored phenomena in the literature on decentralized budget models – both an increased awareness of budgetary milestones and increased sense of expectation to participate in the annual budget review. In centralized budget models, academic deans are more reactive in awaiting budget allocations from the provost's office. Deans can blame the “black box” of the budget process as an excuse for not informing their senior teams about academic and fiscal priorities (Lasher & Sullivan, 2005). In decentralized, revenue-centered budget models, however, authority over academic and fiscal affairs becomes a local concern; associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors know that their dean manages the budget of their college. Moreover, administrators in colleges talk with colleagues in other colleges across campus, comparing notes on how their deans engage them during the budget review. With this altered social landscape, deans should expect that members of their senior team

want to contribute to articulating the college's academic and fiscal priorities during annual budget reviews.

Fourth, my findings underscore that individuals within colleges look to their dean to articulate some version of priorities. In particular, associate deans and administrative directors within colleges expect their deans to construct a tangible sense of academic priorities. Within decentralized budget environments, this expectation might be amplified as associate deans and administrative directors believe that their deans have the authority to develop some sense of priorities. Deans should not feel compelled to conjure this blueprint in isolation – in fact, my findings suggest that this approach would be misguided – but deans should establish some process for developing and articulating priorities. When deans ignore this critical work, associate deans and administrative directors can lose sight of how their own efforts advance the college's priorities. This observation echoes insights from previous deans, calling for deans to generate a sense of participation and specify a sense of common goals throughout their colleges (Dill, 1980; Morris, 1981).

My findings also advance the literature on sensemaking in organizations. First, my findings contribute to an emerging literature that envisions sensemaking in organizations as a collective endeavor, particularly within the context of teams. Within the face-to-face setting of meetings, academic deans and members of their senior teams construct a shared sense of understanding about the college's priorities, including articulations of priorities for the annual budget memo. In these colleges, deans and their senior teams devised an emergent understanding of issues and problems, aggregating interpretations of what the college has done in the past and what it could do in the future.

Discussions of these senior teams demonstrate how sensemaking transpires in real time as deans, associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors grapple with the meaning of priorities in their colleges. The annual budget review provides an occasion from which deans and their teams can bracket the happening of "shaping academic priorities" and generate the corresponding meaning of these priorities.

Second, my findings contribute to an emerging literature that envisions sensemaking in organizations as prospective as well as retrospective. The collective sensemaking of Dean Joyce's and Dean Swift's teams spanned temporal boundaries in three ways: it interrogated interpretations of past events; it assessed impressions of current situations; and it anticipated future implications and outcomes that accompanied potential courses of action. In these discussions, deans and members of senior teams debated the past and speculated about the future to better sketch their understanding of the present. The discussions of these two senior teams demonstrate the conception of prospective sensemaking advanced by Gioia and Mehra (1996). Dean Joyce and Dean Swift, along with members of their senior teams, were prospecting the priorities of their colleges, discovering ideas that could advance the academic missions of their colleges into the future.

Third, my findings animate the negative consequences of sensemaking gaps by delineating the negative consequences – even dysfunctions – that emerge in organizations when senior managers dismiss opportunities for sensemaking. Maitlis (2005) has described the outcomes of passive forms of organizational sensemaking such as minimal sensemaking and restricted sensemaking in terms of generating divergent or superficial accounts of strategic priorities. Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) further argued that

sensemaking gaps emerge in organizations when individuals perceive that leaders are not translating the meaning of strategic issues into actionable priorities for the organization.

These studies, however, do not animate the frustration and resentment that stem from these passive forms of sensemaking. My findings begin to bridge this gap, particularly within the context of senior administrative teams. The consequences of adopting passive forms of sensemaking, or even ignoring sensemaking altogether, include generating confusion and evoking strong negative emotions. The criticisms from associate deans in Dean Conrad's college or Dean Stowe's college were not dispassionate. Instead administrators in these colleges expressed anger and resentment over an absence of opportunities to inform and influence the academic priorities. My findings indicate that a dearth of sensemaking might not only generate an anxious and uninformed, and even aimless, senior administrative team, but also a disheartened and embittered one. This insight underscores the importance of senior managers in stimulating and shepherding sensemaking in organizations. A failure to engender some shared sense of purpose not only creates confusion, but also discouraging distractions.

Over the past two chapters, I have explored the ways in which the profiled academic deans engage their senior teams during the annual budget review. In the previous chapter, I described that the deans who distributed authorship of the annual budget memorandum marshaled the expertise of their associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors to complete the document. In this chapter, I found that these deans adopted their approach to authoring the annual budget memo in hopes of establishing a collective sense of academic priorities. With these insights, I now turn my attention to investigating the relationship between these deans and their senior teams in

more detail. In particular, I turn my analytical focus to examining how these deans actually engage their senior teams to create the environment that would stimulate collective sensemaking and help establish a collective sense of priorities among the team.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **Stimulating Dialogue on Senior Teams:**

#### **Creating an Environment for Cultivating Collective Sensemaking**

##### **Introduction**

Over the past two chapters, I have examined the ways in which six profiled academic deans engaged their senior teams during the annual budget review at Sprawling University. In Chapter 6, I found that the deans who distributed authorship of the annual budget memorandum marshaled the expertise and experience of their associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors to complete the document. These deans invited members of their senior teams to write portions of the budget memo as well as review and critique other sections of the document, including those written by the deans. Moreover, these deans and their senior teams discussed and debated drafts of the memo as a team. In Chapter 7, I found that these deans adopted their approach to authoring the annual budget memo in hopes of establishing a collective sense of academic priorities. Some of these deans leveraged authorship to generate and refine new ideas for academic priorities, harnessing the insights from their colleagues to craft richer interpretations of issues and problems. For these deans and their senior teams, debate of academic priorities during the budget review often took the form of collective sensemaking.



After understanding these insights, I turned my attention to investigating the relationship between these deans and their senior teams in more detail. In the previous chapters, I had discovered that the deans who distributed authorship had assembled and nurtured senior teams that were capable of helping them make sense of the complex issues and problems that confronted their colleges during the annual budget review. But I had yet to determine how these deans actually engaged their senior teams to create the environment that would stimulate collective sensemaking. What behaviors did these deans enact to foster an environment that stimulated collective sensemaking among their associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors? I explore this question in this chapter.

Unfortunately, the literature on academic deans provides few insights about how deans work with their senior teams, as explained in Chapter 7. Once again, although researchers have not explored the relationship between deans and their senior teams, some scholars have examined how university presidents engage their senior teams. Bensimon and Neumann (1993) advised presidents to adopt collaborative and interactive approaches to solving problems with their senior teams, which they called “relational work” (p. 106). In particular, they recommend three relational behaviors. First, presidents should foster an open atmosphere that promotes candor across the team. Second, presidents can establish this mood by demonstrating vulnerability. “By modeling openness as well as talking about the need for it, the president is likely to assure group members that they can express themselves openly without fear of reprisal, ridicule, or alienation” (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 108). Third, presidents and their teams

should “think beyond” traditional boundaries such as functional responsibilities while exploring problems as a team (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993, p. 113).

The relational perspective of leadership and management that typifies these recommendations claims a rich heritage in organization theory. Seminal texts from sociology, including Berger and Luckman’s (1967) and Garfinkel’s (1967) conceptualizations of the social construction of reality, have long informed theorization in organization theory, including sensemaking. From this perspective, leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon, emerging as the product of interactions among managers and other individuals, including their bosses, their colleagues and their subordinates (Morgan 1997; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Over the past decade, a number of scholars have returned to conceptualizing management through a relational lens. This resurgence, which has been called "relational leadership" (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011), "facilitating for dialogue" (Raelin, 2013) and "facilitative leadership" (Fryer, 2012), reorients scholars to the intersubjectivity of managerial practice.

This relational perspective recasts the nature of managerial work by defining leadership as cultivating meaning as much as making decision, formulating strategies or issuing directives. Managers become the stewards of social context, learning what questions to ask in hopes of constructing some understanding of situations and sense of what needs to happen. Tsoukas and Chia (2002), for example, called for managers to leverage their privileged positions in hierarchies to introduce new “discursive templates” that are less scripted and more emergent. Similarly, Cunliffe (2001) envisioned managers as “practical authors,” guiding how individuals communicate with each other across their organizations. Managers become the chief interlocutors of organizations, “going out and

talking with people, getting many voices involved in dialogue, questioning, listening, coming to some kind of shared meaning” for themselves and everyone else (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1441). From this perspective, meetings serve as essential forums for managers to tease out what is “meaningful and possible” for their organizations with their colleagues, superiors and subordinates (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011, p. 1434).

With their emphasis on intersubjectivity, these organizational scholars have drawn inspiration from the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and Jürgen Habermas because both theorists envision individuals using language to construct shared meaning and negotiate future action. Bakhtin differentiates between two forms of communication – dialogism and monologism. With monologism, only one voice has the authority to express the truth. “Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 292-93). If only one voice expresses the truth, then monologism assumes an oppressive character; someone who knows the truth “instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 81). For the same reason, monologism represents a conclusive and definitive form of interaction. It is “deaf to other’s response ... pretends to be the *ultimate word*” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293).

In contrast, Bakhtin presents dialogism as an alternative multivocal framework for communication. He believed that life was inherently dialogic, arguing, “the single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human existence is the *open-ended dialogue* ... To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). Individuals discover “the truth” by talking with each other. “Truth is not born nor is to be found inside the head of an individual

person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110). The enduring image of Bakhtin’s dialogue is “polyphony,” or a “multiplicity of consciousnesses,” which he extracted from an analysis of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novels. Instead of situating multiple “fates” in a “single objective world,” Bakhtin (1984) concluded that Dostoyevsky structured his novels to create a multitude of independent voices, or “consciousnesses,” that illuminate each other (p. 6). The existence of polyphony implies the coexistence of multiple voices, and multiple meanings, that intersect, but do not necessarily merge.

In addition to dialogism, scholars have applied the concept of communicative action to advance their relational perspectives of leadership. Jürgen Habermas argued that individuals coordinate their behavior through communication – talking, listening, creating plans for action. This communication assumes two forms – strategic action or communicative action. With strategic action, individuals use language to persuade, compel and even manipulate others to agree to plans that serve their own interests. Strategic action retains an instrumental character because individuals cooperate with other individuals only to the degree that it meets their “egocentric calculations of utility” (Habermas, 1984, p. 94).

In contrast, with communicative action, individuals talk and listen to create understanding before devising a mutual course of action. "I shall speak of *communicative* action whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding" (Habermas, 1984, pp. 285-286). After constructing shared definitions of situations, individuals then coordinate or “harmonize” their plans for action (Habermas, 1984). To reach mutual understanding,

individuals test their conversations by applying certain “acceptability conditions.”

Talkers invite listeners to scrutinize their authority to raise claims, the accuracy of their claims and their motivations for asserting their claims. During conversation, individuals accomplish “an ideal speech situation” when they sense this license to scrutinize each other’s assertions (Habermas, 1984, 1987, 2001).

Scholars who have analyzed organizational life through this relational perspective acknowledge that the concepts of communicative action and dialogism can seem naïve. In discussing communicative action, Fryer (2012) concedes, “even attempting to lead in such a manner” might be “hopelessly unrealistic” (p. 38). “Quite apart from its incompatibility with conventional expectations, which tend to call upon leaders to ‘lead the way,’ it may be that the demands of organizational life simply do not lend themselves to consultative decision-making of the kind envisaged by Habermasian theory” (Fryer, 2012, p. 38). Other scholars anticipate a similar fate for Bakhtin’s vision of dialogism. Managers wanting to facilitate dialogue encounter pressing operational concerns such as formulating budgets and meeting project deadlines that do not lend themselves to encouraging polyphony (Raelin, 2013). At some point, managers make decisions; and these decisions are bound to privilege some perspectives while discounting others. Some ideas (and their champions) “win” while other ideas (and their proponents) “lose.”

These scholars, however, caution against dismissing relational perspectives of leadership as impractical. The potential influence of these ideas on the conceptualization of managerial practice does not require the eradication of monologism or institutionalization of ideal speech situations in organizations. Instead scholars envision more circumscribed applications of these concepts, which echo Tsoukas and Chia’s

(2002) call to introduce new discursive templates. First, managers could champion unrestricted communication. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) envisioned managers promoting more "open dialogue" or conversations that avoid "pre-judgments." Similarly, Fryer (2012) advised managers to encourage their subordinates to question, and even challenge, their assertions as well as those of their colleagues, regardless of hierarchal status. To stimulate dialogue, Raelin (2013) invited managers to reflect on the question of, "Does the discourse invite deep listening of one another characterized by an exploration of new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes?" (p. 832).

Second, managers could canvass their organizations to capture a more diverse set of perspectives. Raelin (2013) called for managers to consider the extent to which their organizations foster safe forums that solicit and legitimize "all helpful voices, even those heretofore unheard" (p. 832). Similarly, Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) challenged managers to facilitate dialogue across the organization that promotes "questioning" and "challenging." By inviting debate, managers help to "surface" tensions across their organizations, which enables everyone to consider a richer set of perspectives while exploring problems. Fryer (2012) advised managers to create "sheltered forums" that encourage individuals to debate divergent views. Lorino, Tricard and Clot (2011) rejected criticisms that the idea of relational management was an impractical, "virtuous" ideal. Instead they argued that stimulating dialogue could improve decision making and problem solving by uncovering diverse and conflicting voices throughout organizations.

With this emphasis on unrestricted communication and diverse perspectives, these relational concepts present opportunities to expand our conceptualization of sensemaking in organizations. With sensemaking, individuals talk situations into existence, which

establishes sufficient meaning to rationalize action. With dialogue, individuals communicate to construct meaning, which reveals their preferences for action. With communicative action, individuals talk to probe each other's claims and create mutual understanding, which informs the coordination of action. Despite these assumptions in common, scholars have rarely coupled these concepts. Wright and Manning (2004) applied communicative action to develop the idea of "resourceful sensemaking," arguing that individuals use dialogue to discover and scrutinize new perspectives in team settings. By analyzing film of a professional soccer team, Cunliffe and Coupland (2011) found that individuals construct meaning through back-and-forth dialogue, which often blurs their own distinctions of sensemaking and sensegiving. Weick (2012) noted that Cunliffe and Coupland's use of dialogism demonstrated that encouraging and capturing multiple voices could enrich our understanding of sensemaking in organizations.

I agree. Recent articulations of relational leadership, along with earlier insights from research on the senior teams of presidents, help to frame the findings of this chapter. I explore a phenomenon that emerged from interviews and observations during the annual budget review at Sprawling University – how the academic deans who distributed authorship of the annual budget memo stimulated dialogue with their senior teams to establish a collective sense of academic priorities. During the annual budget review, these deans reaped the benefit of developing and nurturing senior teams that could help them make sense of the complex set of issues and problems that confronted their colleges. In particular, these deans enacted specific discursive practices, which I detail below, that aimed to stimulate open and rich dialogue in hopes of developing a collective sense of academic priorities among their senior teams.

## Findings

### Practice #1: Restraining Personal Preferences

The first discursive practice for creating an environment that stimulates dialogue is for academic deans to exercise some restraint in revealing their personal preferences while discussing issues and problems with their senior team.

#### *Dean Swift*

During meetings of the senior team, Dean Swift does not consider himself “the leader” of the team’s discussion. Instead he envisions himself “as one of the participants,” albeit one that contributes “unique background and unique information” to the discussion.” He prefers to keep “everything open for discussion,” worrying that imposing his opinion would stifle the team’s imagination while brainstorming ideas. Instead he wants to “see what other people think” on issues before divulging his opinion. “I virtually never put something out there and say, ‘This is what I think we should do. Don't you agree? Don't you think we should do this?’” At times, the dean is willing to interject a “mid-course correction,” arguing, “maybe people weren't aware of w, y, or z or hadn't had that experience or didn't ever have that perspective because they'd never sat in my seat.” But he avoids proposing recommendations until associate deans and administrative directors have offered their own ideas.

Dean Swift demonstrates this penchant for restraint during meetings with the college’s senior team. In one meeting during the annual budget review, he initiated a discussion of the college’s strategy for alumni relations, closing his introduction by saying, “I’m going to quit here in terms of talking about the background and ask [an



associate dean] if you've got further things to add before we go forward and say what [activities] would help plan the future of [alumni relations].” During a different meeting with the senior team, the dean stimulated a 60-minute discussion of funding priorities, beginning the conversation by saying, “I don't want to constrain [discussion] at the beginning. I don't want to put all of [my] ideas on the table at the beginning because I think that would constrain [our discussion].” During this discussion, Dean Swift expressed clear opinions on several key issues, including the college’s efforts to address specific social problems and prioritize urban outreach, but chose not to disclose these preferences until other members of the senior team had offered their own perspectives.

In another example, during a meeting about the budget memo, Dean Swift waited to voice his preferences for organizing assessment activities in the college. Members of the senior team had argued that the college should hire an assessment specialist to assist faculty and administrators across the college who had begun assessing learning outcomes. Dean Swift proposed an alternative course of action, but only after members of the senior team offered their ideas. The dean argued, “not everybody who wishes to be doing research most of the time is thrilled to be giving service to lots of other people. They'd rather be doing their research.” For this reason, the dean preferred to hire a research scientist who could make assessment the “majority of their portfolio”; then the college would not need “a whole bunch” of faculty “part-timers” to coordinate assessment projects. This dedicated specialist could create “a nucleus” of activity, “somebody that our faculty can latch on to and work with.” The dean’s perspective, which was offered after the associate deans had explored the issue for 10 minutes, helped to shape a

proposal for a “mixed model” in which a research scientist would conduct assessment research for the college and collaborate with faculty who were interested in assessment.

*Dean Austen*

Dean Austen aims to stimulate animated discussion among the senior team. During the annual budget review, the dean strives to not “be overly directive” in meetings about the budget memo because she worries that disclosing her opinion before other colleagues offer their perspectives could thwart the creativity of the senior team. “If I go in there and basically say, ‘This is what I want,’ that doesn’t create any space, really, for anybody else, without them being overly aggressive.” In the dean’s experience, “no one wants to discuss anything” once deans have articulated strong preferences for action. “If I am just there to impose my will, we shouldn’t have a meeting. I should just send out the [budget] memo.”

*Dean Joyce*

During meetings of the senior team, Dean Joyce avoids revealing his preferences until other individuals have expressed their opinions because meetings should not focus on “affirming” his ideas. “If I started off meetings by saying what I thought, even if I genuinely meant this is my opinion and I’m interested in yours, it’s hard for people not to want to agree with the boss.” Since becoming a dean, Dean Joyce has learned to provide space during meetings for members of the senior team to contribute their ideas. “At least, to give everybody a chance, as a way of helping them feel comfortable with expressing themselves.” In his experience, some senior administrators fail to grasp this social reality.

"I've seen leaders who don't do that and I think I've learned negative lessons from them. People who do lay out their cards before any of their team members do and then the team kind of feels like 'well, okay, we know what the answer is, what do we say?'" Instead the dean tries to listen more and talk less during meetings of the senior team. He confesses that adopting this approach has been difficult at times, requiring him to adjust his behavior. "What I ... realized is I've got to recede a little bit into the background."

During meetings, Dean Joyce often suppresses his perspective until his colleagues have offered their ideas. To end one meeting during the budget review, he asked everyone to identify one promising project from an initial list of potential strategic investments. "So, we have 20 minutes left. I'd like to hear from each of you. What you came with as your current passion for a project that wasn't one you proposed." The dean, however, did not identify a potential project because he wanted "to maintain more of an open mind." "I decided by the way – I have my own – but I would rather not speak to this today because I don't want to shape the discussion too much ... I am happy to participate in the discussion, but I'd rather not say what my favorites are at the moment."

This practice was commonplace. In one meeting, in which the senior team was exploring potential strategic investments to profile in the budget memo, members of the team debated the creation of new incentives to stimulate faculty research. On their own before the meeting, members of the team identified numerous ideas for supporting faculty research, including increasing start-up packages and reducing the teaching loads of faculty. Over 10 minutes of discussion, Dean Joyce spoke only several times – to clarify the college's policies on start-up packages and course releases. On several occasions, a member of the senior team expressed concern that promoting course releases might be

encouraging a culture that marginalized teaching and service in the college. In response, Dean Joyce announced that he held a similar concern, disclosing,

As somebody who has had a fairly reasonable research career and cares a lot about teaching, it does bother me that our culture fosters a default perspective in a very high fraction of our junior faculty, if not in all of them, that teaching is to be avoided at all costs. And that's, that's what the goal is. Teaching is not a plus; it's a necessary evil. I think it's a bad culture. I think it's, part of why I think it's bad is that I actually think our impact on the world often is greater through the students that we train and foster and inspire than through many of the research papers that we write. The idea that getting a paper accepted and getting it cited 15 times has more impact on the world than inspiring 30 students, I don't accept that – that's after [many] years of experience and my own personal perspective.

Despite this perspective, Dean Joyce supported increasing the college's incentives for faculty research. He argued that funding faculty research was an incentive to recruit faculty members as much as a means for actually stimulating research.

The thing we cannot avoid is that we are competing in a world – this is not a Sprawling culture – this is the culture for top research universities. So, I am not as convinced on the [faculty] grants by the argument that they may not get tenure and we would have wasted our investment ... What I am concerned about is getting the good people here in the first place. I am concerned about both, but I, where I sit is negotiating deals all of the time. Getting people here, particularly coming out of certain fields where the norm is increasingly becoming a two-course teaching load or at least a three-course teaching load but with a mid, a fourth-year sabbatical, it's getting harder. It's getting to be a regular thing.

On this issue, Dean Joyce held a strong, deeply personal opinion. On one hand, the college needed incentives to attract top faculty recruits. Yet on the other hand, he believed that these incentives could privilege research over teaching in the college, which troubled him and contradicted his own notion of impact as a professor. Instead of anchoring the team's discussion in his own vivid perspective, he waited to disclose his opinion until other members of the senior team could offer their impressions. This

patience allowed the team to explore other pertinent issues with the proposal, including the college's tenure rate and the research productivity of associate professors, that might not had been unearthed had Dean Joyce offered his perspective earlier in the discussion.

### *Dean Stowe*

Although she dominated authorship of the annual budget memo, Dean Stowe espouses the practice of withholding her opinion during the annual discussion of the budget with the college's faculty. Dean Stowe's espoused "synthetic" approach requires her to "listen deeply," which forces her to withhold her perspective until others express their ideas. "Part of [her church's] training is that you resist pushing forward your own agenda until you're sure nobody else shares it and is going to bring it forward for themselves." The dean believes that focusing on listening more than interjecting stimulates a freer expression of ideas among administrators and faculty, which helps to reveal the larger "truth" about issues and problems. "Usually, if I'd had a good idea, somebody else in fact shared it. As long as I created a safe place for bringing forward ideas, it would emerge." This mantra of restraint demands patience from leaders. "Your role [as dean] is certainly to suggest the next direction, but to do it in the consciousness of all the voices you've heard and ... how you move forward to create a total consensus."

In general, Dean Stowe only voices her perspective if "no other person had spoken that opinion, and so there was a piece of the truth that was actually invisible still." Despite this penchant for restraint, Dean Stowe feels obligated to disclose her perspective before others speak under "unusual circumstances." The dean, for example, interjects her opinion to "diffuse" tension during discussions. "I will ... do it with the faculty, if I feel

they're reaching some kind of head to head and I think I can diffuse it by presenting my own point of view." Similarly, she introduces her own perspective to help groups of marginalized faculty. "If I feel that there's a group that may feel less powerful like the junior faculty appear to be sort of gathering around a point of view that no one else is adopting. If that matches something I'm feeling and thinking I might weigh in to sort of tip the balance of power a little differently."

### **Practice #2: Specifying Questions, Not Answers**

The second discursive practice for creating an environment that stimulates dialogue is for academic deans to focus more on specifying the right questions to explore rather than proposing specific answers to these questions while discussing issues and problems as a team.

#### *Dean Swift*

During discussions with the senior team, Dean Swift tries to contextualize an issue to "kick off" discussion "in a productive direction." He does not disclose his specific opinion, but acknowledges that the senior team wants his interpretation of the context before brainstorming priorities. As the dean said during one meeting with the senior team, he wants "to make sure that we're all on the same page here before we start doing our brainstorming." When introducing an issue, Dean Swift is even willing to express enthusiasm for an opportunity that could improve the college, introducing an idea by saying, "How cool would that be?" or "Here's a great opportunity."

Dean Swift often frames issues by providing extensive background information. During a meeting about the budget memo, for example, the dean contextualized an issue that had yet to be discussed by the senior team almost an hour into discussion – the college's strategy for online education. “So, one big thing that we haven’t discussed is online education, or new technology for education.” To introduce the issue, the dean offered his assessment of the college’s efforts to date. “I know that several of us around the table feel like we can experiment, we can experiment – do a little of this, do a little of that – and we'll learn a few things,” adding, “Some of us feel like we don't have an organized enough of a plan to make sure that we learn the right things to then make decisions that really point us to some place in the future.”

After offering his appraisal, Dean Swift challenged the senior team to consider the lessons learned from the college’s experiments with online education. “We're trying out little things and we can't just can't be trying out little things. But wouldn't it be possible for us to have a more organized approach to this? And to conduct experiments to learn specific things to guide decisions at the junctures that we're envisioning about student learning?” The dean proposed mentioning in the budget memo an intention to revisit the college’s strategy for online education. “I think we should say that we, we intend to tackle this over the next year.” The dean also characterized the issue as "a little bit complicated" because there are "different clusters of activities" in the college and across campus, emphasizing, "we don't want to step on toes." This example illustrates how the dean outlines issues to explore without prescribing specific answers. Dean Swift explicitly proposed mentioning online education in the budget memo, but then looked to

the senior team to formulate a plan for revisioning the college's approach to online education.

During a different meeting, Dean Swift introduced the issue of recasting the college's alumni outreach program to the senior team. "My opinion is that we can tremendously expand our alumni engagement efforts." The dean wanted to "set the stage" for how the college could better translate engaged alumni into donors. In the dean's opinion, the college's current approach focused too much on courting wealthy donors at the expense of engaging a broader set of alumni. On one hand, the college needed a program that targeted "donors and soon-to-be donors." On the other hand, the college should develop another set of programs that "don't really have dollars as any sort of immediate or even near-term objective." "We find low-cost ways to create huge amounts of excitement among maybe tens of thousands of [alumni]." Before inviting an associate dean to lead the team's discussion, the dean reiterated that the college's alumni efforts could feature several components.

Where we could go in my mind is we have to draw a fuzzy line and either say that something is on the advancement/fundraising side, and it's fine if those are smaller programs and more tailored and more the same kind of things every year touching the same kind of people that are giving us millions of dollars. And then there's this other side of things that I think of that are maybe more aligned with an overarching communications and engagement kind of strategy.

Once again, Dean Swift specified an issue that he wanted the senior team to explore – expanding the nature of alumni engagement – but without imposing a specification for the plan beyond encouraging them to pursue some sort of broader alumni engagement beyond courting their wealthiest donors.



*Dean Austen*

Dean Austen poses “open-ended” questions to stimulate conversations with the college’s senior team. To focus discussion of priorities, the dean situates questions within the context of looming decisions such as addressing certain sections of the budget memo or preparing for the budget conference. “I always think about [questions] as being structured around some sort of decision we have to take.” She elaborates,

I really try to say, ‘We need to get somewhere,’ and that somewhere is either we need a decision about what we are going to do about item X, or I need you to advise me about how we should think about what are the issues we should think about, in considering item Y, such that I can take a decision.

She characterizes her typical script as, “‘Here is a difficulty that we are facing. How might we address this?’”

Dean Austen, however, avoids posing unfocused questions to the senior team when exploring “strategic” issues such as academic priorities. In her experience, administrators who ask vague questions miss opportunities to stimulate constructive discussion because individuals cannot process imprecise questions, especially in group settings. “I never do ... ‘the topic X, what do you think about it?’” because “if you just leave [a question] out there, then it’s too frustrating for people.” Instead the dean believes that members of the senior team look to her to shepherd a “structuration” process. “You are continually saying, ‘Where are we trying to go? What’s the decision we need to take, the input we need to have,’ and ‘what else is happening in the room?’”

*Dean Joyce*

Dean Joyce does not “manipulate” the senior team “to get from here to there” during discussions about the college’s strategic investments. To initiate discussion, he “consciously” asks questions, and even provides accompanying context, but then encourages everyone else to talk before airing his opinion. “I’ll put [a question] forward and then we’ll have a debate or somebody else will put it forward and we’ll have a debate.” Dean Joyce “judges” whether “an idea is good or not,” but only after inviting and receiving feedback from members of the senior team. “I don’t mind reaching a conclusion and drawing the team together. Hopefully, we all agree in the end, but I’m comfortable with that because I have a good sense of what our objectives are to measure it against.” He does not impose answers on the senior team, but knows the issues that they need to address. “I know what problem I want us to solve, or I know what opportunity I want us to grab or at least to consider grabbing.”

Dean Joyce demonstrates this focus on defining problems rather than suggesting answers during meetings of the senior team during the budget review. In one meeting, the dean sets the stage for the discussion by establishing a goal for the meeting – formulating the decision criteria for evaluating potential strategic investments. Within two minutes of convening, Dean Joyce introduces discussion, saying,

Okay, let's move on to this week's topic. There are two things related to moving forward on our investment planning. The first was to discuss criteria for scoring the investment proposals; and then I want to hear about what your favorite ideas were at this point. Not a straw poll, but a surfacing of passions and enthusiasms. So, I sent out a first draft of evaluation criteria that [the finance director] already put together from our [weekly] meeting last week. And basically, we're just going to open the floor for people to react – comments, suggest changes to that and kind of see where we are.

Dean Joyce reiterated the preference to discuss everyone's impressions of the criteria rather than to tally everyone's initial scoring of the potential investments. "I don't want to overdo the scoring in a numerical sense. I'm mainly concerned qualitatively about the, the mindset we have as we think about these and I think we'd like to align in the same direction." This framing helped the senior team to focus its efforts on debating the criteria for evaluating proposed initiatives before judging their initial list of potential initiatives.

Dean Joyce adopted a similar approach during their next meeting when the team discussed their initial rankings of potential strategic investments. As an introduction, he suggested "a starting place" for discussion. Each member of the senior team had scored an initial list of potential investments on numerous dimensions. Instead of interrogating their initial scores, the dean recommended that everyone explain the rationales that guided their scoring, including their interpretations of criteria, saying,

What I suggest is that we all have the summary table in front of us at the moment, and the summary table of the scores, which totals up the scores for a start, and maybe if we each take a moment to say if there is anything that particularly surprised us about the total scores, and then we can start going into details. What I think we're probably going to want to do, since we all knew this was an issue and we all had somewhat different distributions of our numbers and scales. Some of us were low graders, some of us were high graders, some had more variance. This is just a starting place for getting us discussing. So if we look for anomalies, or look for things that surprise us, then that will give us a sense of where we can start discussing things and see what sort of agreement we can reach.

After fielding several questions about this suggestion from members of the team, Dean Joyce added, "So, let's start with everyone having a chance to identify – not long speeches – just identify any surprises they see in the total scores. Higher or lower than they expected." Dean Joyce's focus on asking these fundamental questions rather than immediately tallying and debating everyone's initial scoring disciplined the senior team's

initial efforts to formulate the criteria by which they could eventually evaluate and rank potential strategic investments.

*Dean Huxley*

During meetings of the senior team, Dean Huxley aims to balance providing structure and flexibility. On one hand, the team's discussions reflect "a fairly formal" structure. The dean sets an agenda for the meeting, asking the associate deans to submit issues to address in advance. By his own account, the dean sometimes "dominates" the agenda, using this forum to explore everyone's perspective on "pressing" issues. Yet he also tries to offer "a lot of latitude" during these meetings, avoiding "rigid" control. "I tend to be pretty informal in my style, but I like to think that it's not totally unmanaged." During these discussions, the dean focuses on "creating ideas" more than making decisions. He wants the senior team to dive into discussion, preferring not to constrain their exploration of issues together. "The form that that often would take is my going in and dropping a little bomb on the table and then having people go at it."

The finance director echoes this characterization of meetings of the senior team. Dean Huxley prefers to "open it up for comment" from everyone, adding that the dean "doesn't expect final answers during meetings" with the senior team. "Here, very few meetings are set up or designed even, to make a decision." Instead discussions with the senior team "really are exploratory sessions." The finance director explains that the dean frames these discussions as forums "to explore," which are then followed by other meetings "behind the scenes" to formalize decisions. The finance director warns that the dean's approach, "depending on how far you carry that," runs the risk of generating few tangible outcomes due to a lack of structure. Yet this administrator believes that his

colleagues on the senior team are sensitive to this balancing act, citing their collective effort at authoring the budget memo as an example. “That's the thing that I think other folks are also keyed into thinking about while we're having those circular meetings. When we come back in visiting things that require somebody to recognize that if we don't actually come to a consensus soon, we won't get the answer we need.”

### **Practice #3: Inviting Diverse Perspectives**

The third discursive practice for creating an environment that stimulates dialogue is for academic deans to invite diverse perspectives while exploring issues and problems with their senior team.

#### *Dean Swift*

Members of the senior team universally applaud Dean Swift's “very collegial” approach to shaping priorities, which they contrast with his predecessor's style. One associate dean describes Dean Swift as a “bottom up” leader whereas his predecessor was “top down.” Similarly, an administrative director characterizes the previous dean as “command and control,” describing him as “clearly the direction setter.” “That dean was very, very focused. His leadership style was much more direct, brusque almost.” The previous dean was “very clear and candid about what he thought his vision was and he was here to ... implement his vision.” Another administrative director remembers Dean Swift's predecessor as “brash”; many faculty and staff could not “deal” with him. An associate dean echoes this assessment, suggesting that the previous dean alienated many faculty. “The list of faculty” who did not like the previous dean “got longer a lot faster.”

Members of the senior team, however, acknowledge the previous dean's accomplishments. An associate dean claims, "things did happen" and "there were some real positive outcomes," even if the previous dean used "sharp-elbowed" tactics to push initiatives. An administrative director describes the previous dean as "very effective," citing the completion of new buildings and an increase in reputational ranking. But his "directive" approach offers a cautionary tale for deans, according to this administrator. "The danger was because of the lack of deliberation, by the time he was considering two or three ideas, the good idea was maybe already gone – or never there." A different administrative director explains that apart from a former finance director, the previous dean did not seek ideas and feedback across the college. "Previously, [with the previous dean], there were only a few people who gave him ideas that he would accept."

In contrast, Dean Swift adopts an "open" and "very synthetic" approach to shaping priorities. One administrative director compares Dean Swift to his predecessor, explaining, their styles differ in "the angle of approach or the tone and tenor." "What is very different ... he both explicitly and implicitly with his personality, questions ... he encourages debate, other ideas, puts options on the table." The dean is "very good" about "drawing out" the team's ideas, posing invitations such as "I'd like to hear everybody's comments" or "I would like to have everybody give me some input on this." Other members of the senior team echo this depiction. One associate dean loves that Dean Swift does not allow anyone to "just sit there quietly and not say anything"; he will "certainly call on people and ask them what they think." Another associate dean contrasts the dean's open style with that of "controlling" and "insecure" deans. "Insecure deans, they don't want to be surprised. But with Dean Swift, it doesn't matter to him." Another associate

dean describes meetings of the senior team as “a place for everyone to get a diverse set of opinions on what we should be doing and thinking about what our priorities should be.”

During meetings about the annual budget memo, Dean Swift pushes associate deans and administrative directors to identify new perspectives. At the end of one meeting, for example, Dean Swift encouraged members of the senior team to continue voicing additional ideas to include in the budget memo. “Okay, ordinarily we go around the table and ask each person individually whether there are other things you want to talk about. But instead I think we should do a free-for-all ... is there anybody else who has something else you'd like to mention?” To close an earlier 60-minute discussion of funding priorities, Dean Swift encouraged members of the team to continue considering ideas that the team had yet to consider. “We actually want to think about these from the standpoint that, have we missed the important things that aren't up [on the whiteboard] yet? Have we missed important ideas? Or has somebody here framed things, maybe it's the same ideas, that are framed in a way more compelling way?”

Dean Swift describes his approach to inviting diverse perspectives in similar terms. “In that kind of setting, it has to be okay to throw lots of dumb ideas out on the table, otherwise you never get to the good ideas.” The dean underscores this point, arguing, “You have to be able to put yourself out there and suggest things that may not be so sensible because a few of those things that don't sound sensible the first time around, are actually great ideas, but they break the mold so much that people initially are uncomfortable.” Dean Swift is more than willing to let his colleagues take everyone in unexpected directions. “At the end of the day, the conversation may not end where I

would have taken it. But I would say there are plenty times where it ends up some place that's better than where I would have taken it. That's just fine. In fact, that's great.”

### *Dean Austen*

Dean Austen aims to create and protect an “open” space for the senior team to explore issues from numerous perspectives. “Say what you have to say, right here and now, and I will try to make it safe for everyone to say what they have to say.” During meetings of the senior team, the dean wants to keep everyone “open to the element of surprise,” even if she tries to discipline discussion around specific issues and problems confronting the college. “It is important to allow enough exploration to see what [the issue] really is because if you set the tone that we are not going to explore things that people care about, then people aren’t going to bring up things they care about.” When members of the senior team raise unexpected yet “connected” issues, she is willing “go off-topic” to “allow a deeper exploration of that issue.”

To capture a diverse set of perspectives, Dean Austen presses members of the senior team to express their opinions in meetings. “We are not going to be able to work together unless we say what we really mean ... if you really care, then you need to speak up.” In fact, the dean is willing to “call out” colleagues who have yet to talk. “I will say, ‘[An associate dean’s name], we haven’t heard from you about this yet. What do you think?’” The dean will also expose “divergent” perspectives during meetings, though she acknowledges that capturing input in this fashion can be “dicey business.” She tries to respect the space of her colleague, but also wants to avoid “the meeting after the meeting.” “I don’t like the meeting after the meeting ... a meeting after the meeting is,



‘We talked about X, and A, B, C, D was said, but I really believe in E’ ... If that were to happen, I would say, ‘We have got to get that in the meeting.’”

The associate deans describe Dean Austen as trying to enrich and expand everyone’s perspective. An associate dean stresses the extent to which the dean invites input from everyone on the senior team. “I think she’s really good ... she will come with options and then get our feedback.” This administrator describes the dean’s typical script when exploring problems. ““Okay, so what do you think about these options? Number one and number two, what are the implications if we go down one option path? And then number three, how do we communicate these options to our stakeholders?”” This associate dean believes the dean depends on the team to address questions of “what’s the problem here?” and “what are we overlooking?” The dean even encourages the team’s “curmudgeon” to voice the “negative side,” saying, ““well, what do you think’s going to happen?”” Another associate dean contrasts the dean’s tendency to actively invite input from the senior team with that of her predecessor, explaining that “decisions were made by a small group of people” under the previous dean.

#### *Dean Joyce*

Dean Joyce hopes to leverage the expertise of the senior team, even if his colleagues articulate divergent perspectives. “I might have some ideas, but I know other people are going to have good ideas, too, and my ideas are sometimes not the best, or even if they happen to be the right idea, they're always improved by other people.” He acknowledges that members of the senior team often generate “better ideas and “different ideas” than him. For this reason, the dean argues it “would be a waste of talent” to ignore the ideas of “a bunch of smart, creative people around me.”

Dean Joyce invites a diverse set of perspectives during meetings of the senior team. First, the dean often explores the extent to which the team had considered a full range of options. While discussing the potential criteria for evaluating strategic investments, for example, Dean Joyce asks everyone whether there were other important criteria to consider. "I haven't heard anybody mention any criteria that they thought were missing?" After some silence, which the dean did not disturb, an associate dean asks whether the team should include both "riskiness" and "novelty" as criteria for evaluating the investments. In turn, this discussion prompts Dean Joyce to ask members of the senior team to clarify their understanding of "payoff" as a criterion for evaluating the investments – does payoff mean improving society or increasing revenues for the college? During meetings about strategic investments, Dean Joyce often invited feedback that enriched consideration of the criteria for evaluating potential investments.

Second, Dean Joyce is willing to call on specific members of the team to capture a rich set of perspectives. During a discussion of strategic investments, for example, the senior team was exploring the merits of creating a new scholarship program for master's students. With this scholarship program, the college could recruit a stronger cadre of top students for its master's program. After most of his colleagues contributed to discussion, the dean voices enthusiasm for bolstering the master's cohort – "there could be big spillovers, getting four really great students infused into the master's student body could strengthen the whole program in a way that pays off for itself" – but also expresses concern over the return on investment of the proposal – "we're talking about a lot of money for very few students."

During the discussion, Dean Joyce notices that one of the associate deans had not commented on the proposal, despite this administrator's experience teaching courses in the master's program. Dean Joyce asks,

[Associate dean's name], give us, I mean you are our token [master's] faculty member here, do you have a sense if we had ... how much difference do you think it would make if we got four, you know [names top students from past cohorts] – four top, four people like some of the very best you've gotten over the years, if we added three or four per year.

In response, the associate dean offers an alternative definition of the problem and solution for improving the master's cohort. Instead of admitting too few "stars" into the master's program, the college's problem was admitting too many unprepared applicants. "I think [the faculty] complain about the bottom of the master's pool," adding, "If you took a machete to the bottom of the distribution, that would be what would make people happiest ... What they can live with is, is not the top 15 percent being absent. What they can't live with is ... the bottom 15 percent being here." This comment altered discussion of this proposal – enthusiasm for it faded among members of the team, including from its champion – despite the dean and other members of the team highlighting its merits over the previous 15 minutes. It is unclear if this associate dean was going to offer his opinion, but Dean Joyce's explicit request to provide input altered the fate of the proposal, which ultimately led the team to not pursue these scholarships as a strategic investment.

#### **Practice #4: Empowering Disagreement**

The fourth discursive practice for creating an environment that stimulates dialogue is for academic deans to empower disagreement while discussing issues and problems with their senior team.

## *Dean Swift*

Dean Swift empowers members of the senior team to disagree with each other. “Everybody feels they have a chance to shape what's going to happen and, in some cases, even just say, ‘Nope, we're not doing it. Or actually we're doing the opposite of what was just suggested for these reasons.’” Moreover, the dean encourages members of the senior team to disagree with him. “My staff and associate deans know there are no repercussions for disagreeing with the dean,” adding, “I'm not here to push my own agenda.” Instead he wants everyone’s “best thinking,” even if it means rejecting his ideas. “[Members of the senior team] will tell me that they don't agree [with me] or they have a different point of view. Very often, we will not go in the direction I originally had in mind.”

During meetings of the senior team, associate deans and administrative directors seem comfortable disagreeing with each other, including the dean. At times, they do not even respond to the dean’s comments, electing to move discussion in different directions. During one meeting to explore ideas for the budget memo, for example, Dean Swift suggested novel ways that the college could expand its network for recruiting students of color, including engaging ministers. “I'm wondering if it would make as much sense to work with the churches as it does the schools. The churches are a big part that community fabric.” This suggestion, which was in response to an associate dean asking to create a more “continuous presence” in the lives of applicants, did not gain traction. Instead an administrative director asked an associate dean for ideas to better organize the college’s diversity efforts. Without fanfare, the senior team skipped the dean’s comment and moved discussion in a different direction.

Members of the senior team acknowledge the dean's role in encouraging disagreement. One associate dean describes meetings as "lively" because "people aren't afraid to say what they think." Another associate dean credits the dean with fostering a sense of "collegiality" and "trust," which allows members of the team to "put all the issues on the table." Members of the team understand that a "no" from a colleague during debate is not a personal slight but rather "a test" of ideas. A different administrative director argues that this bond assures him that the dean and his colleagues have considered his ideas. "I have a much better sense ... that whatever I did want to say was considered. Sometimes it will change the direction, sometimes not, but I know that it was there to be heard." Another associate dean argues that the senior team's penchant for debate is "really important." "Being open to innovation doesn't mean that everybody says 'yes.' Being open to innovation also means saying 'no' when it's a bad idea." An administrative director considers their meetings as "a safe space" to explore ideas. "You can talk about things. Things don't go outside of that room if they shouldn't."

### *Dean Austen*

By debating ideas together, Dean Austen believes that the senior team generates better ideas for improving the college. The dean's own interest in debating ideas for priorities and proposals has been shaped by her experience as an administrator. Although the dean tried to create "really airtight proposals" early in her career, she now believes that "you can never be that smart" or "consider everything." She chuckles while recalling the times when she has been humbled in meetings. "I have been in too many meetings where I thought I knew the answer, going in, but I was wrong." The dean warns that

administrators “get a little too excited” about their ideas, which impedes their interest in interrogating them.

Instead Dean Austen now espouses a scrutinizing approach to translating nascent ideas into priorities. After the dean or members of the team develop a “well-conceived” idea or an idea that features a “good seed,” she focuses the team’s attention on dissecting the idea, providing it a “full airing.” By offering “robust input” and “thinking” about nascent ideas, the senior team begins to translate ideas into “mature” definitions of priorities that can “move forward” for additional refinement. In contrast, the ideas that never materialize are those that the team does not debate in “enough” detail.

The associate deans describe the senior team’s practice of debating ideas in this fashion. An associate dean applauds the dean’s ability to engender “high collegiality,” while also encouraging a spirit of constructive disagreement. This administrator explains that the dean encourages the senior team to “propose all kinds of things.” After articulating an idea that “resonates” with the dean, she encourages the associate deans to raise the idea with the team to “vet” and “bounce around.” This inclination is reinforced by the team’s enthusiasm for debating ideas together, according to this administrator. “We’re also as a group, pretty astute about knowing who’s going to challenge us on the team of the blind spots and be devil’s advocate and we want to listen to those voices.”

Another associate dean underscores the extent to which the senior team debates nascent ideas, citing priorities that were profiled in previous budget memos, including the retrenchment of an academic department. This administrator describes the dean as framing discussions of the senior team as a “marketplace of ideas.” “At the end of the day, it’s the idea that has to win out, right? And I believe in that. It shouldn’t be my

personality or my aggressiveness that leads to the success or failure of an idea. It should be the quality of the idea itself.” This associate dean looks to the dean and other colleagues to refine ideas into “logical” priorities. “The senior team is thoughtful and they like ideas that are backed up.” During the dean’s tenure, this associate dean has noticed that the senior team increasingly pushes to stimulate ideas beyond “vision and passion” into “fairly concrete” priorities.

### *Dean Joyce*

Dean Joyce encourages debate among the senior team, adhering to an approach called “constructive confrontation.” Before beginning their analysis of strategic investments, the dean convened the senior team to outline his expectations for their monthly meetings. He sensed that members of the team were not used to disagreeing with each other. “It’s not been the style in the college very much in the past due to the personalities in people ... It’s a very friendly, easygoing group. There weren’t a lot of raised voices.” Within this context, the dean felt compelled to explain his expectations for the team. “It wasn’t natural for people to disagree, so I tried to encourage that.”

During this off-site retreat, Dean Joyce described his preferred style for their monthly meetings to discuss the strategic investments. “I follow and wanted them to follow the principle known as constructive confrontation – that people should feel completely safe and free to disagree with anybody, including me, and to argue vociferously, so that we got all the views out on the table, got all the ideas out.” During this discussion, he acknowledged the difficulty of voicing “disagreement” and “controversy,” especially when “you’ve got the boss there.”

At this retreat, an associate dean recalls the dean stressing the importance of “developing the skills to be critical of one another.” “In the lead up to those [investment] decisions, there would be a sense of that, maybe you have the obligation to aggressively pursue points of view, disagreeing with others, not in ad hominem or attacking way.” Similarly, another associate dean remembers Dean Joyce wanting to establish a "sense of mutual vulnerability" among members of the senior team. The encouraged everyone to be "constructively critical with one another."

### **Practice #5: Tempering Turf Distinctions**

The fifth discursive practice for creating an environment that stimulates dialogue is for academic deans to temper turf distinctions on their senior teams, focusing on the best interests of the entire college, while exploring issues and problems as a team.

#### *Dean Swift*

Dean Swift does not fret over jurisdictions within the senior team. While brainstorming priorities during the budget review, he does not worry whether an administrator represents academic or administrative areas of responsibility. Instead the dean wants to capture everyone’s ideas. “I have some staff members that are really, really important, even outside their scope of work.” With some academic issues, for example, the dean invites advice from administrators who are not faculty members. In describing the influence of one specific administrator, the dean explains, “When we're talking about strategic priorities in the college ... I want this guy at the table because he's really good at strategy and imagining what this place could be.”



For this reason, Dean Swift tries to recruit individuals into senior positions who are curious about the whole college, not just their area of responsibility. The dean also seeks out individuals who demonstrate a competitive desire to improve the college. “[The members of the senior team] are very competitive, but they don’t have the egos.” He looks for this competitive spirit in prospective administrators, especially if the individual can channel their ambition into inspiring and motivating the team. “These are kind of ... high achiever types who are very competitive but, when you put them on the team, they're competitive on behalf of the team. They're not competitive with each other. They're trying to make this just the best place.”

Members of the senior team describe these porous boundaries as a key dimension of the team’s culture. One administrative director argues that the absence of territorialism enables the senior team to “talk more holistically” about the college’s problems and “come together” beyond their “disparate” responsibilities. Another administrative director echoes the extent to which “turf” does not matter with the dean or across the team. “It is certainly ... expected that I would ... contribute to the conversation, or share a perspective or an observation or an opinion or volunteer to help or participate in a bigger way.” This administrator believes the dean’s approach helps to foster mutual respect among the associate deans and administrative directors. “I think the culture of that group is one that we all understand that we can contribute to the work ... there's definitely respect for the area of expertise that each member of the team brings.”

*Dean Joyce*

Before exploring potential strategic investments for the college, Dean Joyce believed the college's senior team needed to adopt a more holistic perspective about the college. "We were the executive team for the college and we had to execute as a team." The dean knew that members of the team agreed on the college's broad mission, but he senses a need to encourage everyone to explore "their own ideas" as a team. An associate dean recalls the dean offering this charge during a retreat with the senior team before they began to analyze potential strategic investments. "[Dean Joyce] felt that he created enough of a shared information space about potential objectives ... and it was time to try to draw the threads together."

In particular, Dean Joyce wanted everyone to prioritize the college's best interests ahead of their own domains while debating potential investments. The senior team needed to exist in more than name. The dean explains,

We created a charter and we agreed that we would all step above our individual areas of responsibility, or the others would – mine is the whole college – and try to operate at the college level and reflect the mission and needs of the college as a whole, whether or not our day-to-day jobs were reflecting students or faculty or whatever.

The dean believes that members of the senior team answered this call, contributing to discussions well beyond their functional responsibilities. With this level of engagement, Dean Joyce has been "comfortable" allowing the senior team to operate "as a set of peers," advancing "leadership over their own ideas." "Everybody took some ownership from one idea or another. Sometimes they worked in twosomes, but it was mostly one person took the lead and then relied on the group of us to give them feedback, which is delightful to me."

## **Practice #6: Assembling a Balanced Team**

The sixth discursive practice for creating an environment that stimulates dialogue is for academic deans to assemble a balanced senior team of different types of personalities, proclivities and sensitivities.

### *Dean Swift*

Dean Swift identifies the selection of associate deans and administrative directors as a critical dimension of establishing productive senior teams. The dean tries to be “very, very careful” with whom he selects as associate deans and administrative directors. With associate deans, for example, he wants faculty who have stellar academic reputations and refined interpersonal sensitivities. “It has to be a highly regarded person, a good decision maker and all this kind of thing. But they have to be able to work well with other people and handle difficult and sensitive situations. Those things come up all the time.” The dean avoids selecting individuals who might disrupt the team’s collegial approach to brainstorming ideas. “We don’t tolerate any behind the scenes horsing around ... everybody knows that that’s not the way we operate.”

With his emphasis on brainstorming, Dean Swift wants colleagues on the senior team who demonstrate a range of tolerances for ambiguity. “I tend to surround myself with some variety of people, where they’ve all got to be sort of okay with brainstorming and trying new things, but some of those people are more predictable than others.” This balance is essential to the dean. “Some [administrators] are actually going to keep the train on the tracks. Others are probably going to be pretty constantly pulling the train off the tracks.” The dean needs a combination of these perspectives to stimulate creative yet

feasible priorities. Some positions such as finance director demand more predictability, whereas other positions such as associate deans warrant less predictability. He explains,

I have a colleague who mentioned to me, and I think this is a good way to think about it, on average you ought to hire people that are 85 percent predictable. If people are completely predictable, there is no fun. There is nothing new that gets done. It's like, 'what is the point, you know?' We can hire a manager to keep turning the crank, but that's not what I'm interested in. Of course, if you have people that are too unpredictable, then you have chaos.

To illustrate this point, Dean Swift cites a new initiative in the college, attributing its success to the creativity of one associate dean. "When we wanted to get into [that initiative] in a big way, I made sure that the person we chose there is less predictable. We did amazing things. We've done amazing things in that space very, very quickly that a predictable person would not have been able to pull off."

Members of the senior team value this balance. An associate dean argues that the team's composition is not an accident. "[Dean Swift] does do his homework ... I think he has kind of a good hunch ... He's usually very, very right." Similarly, an administrative director credits the dean with assembling a "nice mix" of individuals. "I think it's how he's chosen the leaders. A lot of it has to do with the personalities and the passions of the individuals that's part of it." Another associate dean argues that the differences in style across the team create just "enough friction" to stimulate debate. This associate dean references a colleague who offers an alternative yet insightful perspective during the team's discussions. "Like [fellow associate dean] is a lot more traditional than I am, but he says, 'I'm worried about this ... what should we do with X and Y?'" These differences in orientation create sufficient "tension" to stimulate the team's creativity, which enriches

the quality of debate. For this reason, this administrator actually looks forward to meetings of the senior team.

More specifically, an associate dean credits Dean Swift with learning how each member of the team approaches solving problems. “If you know that about people, then you know how to work with them in a more effective way.” This associate dean applauds the dean’s ability to accommodate different styles on the team. “You have to have space for the introverts and the extroverts, people who are analytical and the people who are inspirational, the people who are based on intuition versus highly analytical basis and you have to have both.” Some members of the team share the dean’s “real time,” “thinking out loud” style, whereas others prefer a more deliberate approach. This associate dean, for example, contrasts the dean’s style with his own, arguing that that the dean’s style of brainstorming took some time to grasp because he prefers “to have as many facts as possible before necessarily saying anything.”

### **Chapter Discussion**

During the annual budget review at Sprawling University, the academic deans who distributed authorship of the annual budget memorandum reaped the benefit of developing and nurturing senior teams that could help them make sense of the complex set of issues and problems that confronted their colleges. In this chapter, I explored how these deans stimulated open dialogue with their senior teams in hopes of establishing a collective sense of academic priorities. In particular, these deans enacted specific discursive practices that aimed to stimulate dialogue on their senior teams. In some cases, these practices were specific behaviors that deans enacted during meetings with their

senior colleagues. In other cases, these practices were attitudes and expectations that deans established with their senior colleagues in hopes of stimulating dialogue during meetings.

### **Stimulating Dialogue to Cultivate Collective Sensemaking**

Across the profiled deans, I identified six discursive practices that were enacted to stimulate dialogue with their senior teams. First, some deans demonstrate restraint in revealing their own ideas during discussions with their senior teams. Dean Swift does not disclose his preferences until members of the senior team have offered their own ideas, not wanting to constrict the team's brainstorming. Dean Joyce tries to avoid anchoring discussions of the senior team in his opinion, fearing that leading with his impressions might bias and stifle the team's exploration of issues. Dean Austen avoids imposing her assessment on the team, believing that adopting a commanding approach eliminates space for members of the senior team to express their ideas. Even Dean Stowe, who dominated authorship of the budget memo, offers her perspective during an annual meeting about the budget only after allowing her faculty colleagues an opportunity to articulate their ideas. These deans acknowledge that their voices carry significant weight on their senior teams; and to stimulate rich dialogue about issues and problems, they try to demonstrate patience and prudence in disclosing their own ideas during meetings.

Second, the deans who distributed authorship of the budget memo introduced discussion during meetings of their senior teams by specifying the issues and problems that the team needed to explore. These deans know that tossing out vague, ill-defined questions such as "so, what should we do about the budget?" will unlikely stimulate rich

discussion of the college's priorities. Instead some deans carefully contextualized issues during meetings with their senior teams, trying to balance providing background information and discouraging scripted discussions. Dean Swift often articulated his interpretation of the college's history with issues or problems to introduce discussion. Dean Austen believes that members of the senior team expect her to structure an open discussion of strategic issues around potential options for the team to interrogate. Dean Joyce avoids manipulating discussions of the senior team, electing to facilitate open debates about potential strategic investments for the college. Dean Huxley avoids rigid control of team meetings, preferring to loosely frame a problem for the team to debate while hatching ideas – “dropping a little bomb” and then “having people go at it.” While these deans refrain from imposing answers on their senior teams, they believe it is their responsibility to specify the questions that they should be discussing while exploring issues as a team.

Third, some deans stimulated dialogue during meetings of the senior team by inviting diverse perspectives. These deans believe that probing their senior teams for more information – and as importantly, for more diverse information – will help them and their senior teams generate a richer set of academic priorities. These deans tend to know what issues should be explored during discussions, but they look to their senior teams to interrogate them. Dean Swift tries to solicit as many ideas as possible from his colleagues. By teasing out ideas across the team – good, bad, in between – the dean and senior team begin to sketch out the best priorities for the college. During meetings of the senior team, Dean Austen tries to balance creating a safe space in which everyone feels comfortable offering their opinions and pressing her colleagues to reveal their candid

assessments in hopes of uncovering divergent perspectives. Dean Joyce wants to capture the creativity and expertise of his colleagues, encouraging them to contribute their ideas, even if they propose different ideas than him. These deans believe that a prerequisite for exploring ideas as a team is establishing a safe environment in which members of the senior team feel comfortable articulating their candid impressions.

Fourth, some deans not only invite diverse perspectives, but also empower debate and disagreement in hopes of stimulating open dialogue on their senior teams. To stimulate collective sensemaking, these deans realize that members of the senior team need to feel empowered to sound out their ideas about academic priorities, irrespective of whether their assessments confirm, challenge or circumvent the contributions of their colleagues. Dean Swift wants members of the senior team to feel comfortable questioning, even challenging, assertions made during meetings. By exploring ideas together, Dean Austen promotes the interrogation of ideas in hopes of generating priorities for the college. The team's discussions represent a marketplace of ideas; members of the team scrutinize ideas together in hopes of translating nascent ideas into clearer priorities. Dean Joyce encourages debate among the senior team, espousing an approach called "constructive confrontation." By debating ideas as a team, and even arguing with each other, he hopes to develop a collective sense of priorities that will generate a richer set of strategic investments. These deans also encourage their colleagues to disagree with them, acknowledging the difficulty of conveying to members of their teams the desirability of questioning and disagreeing with "the boss."

Finally, several deans stimulated dialogue among the senior team by assembling balanced teams that privilege the college's best interests. Some deans stimulated dialogue



by tempering turf distinctions across their senior teams. During discussions of issues and problems, these deans want their colleagues to prioritize the interests of the college over the interests of their specific areas of responsibility. Dean Swift expects members of the senior team to contribute ideas about the college's priorities, irrespective of whether they represent academic or administrative domains. These porous boundaries engender a more holistic perspective on the college's priorities. Before formulating priorities for the strategic investments, Dean Joyce identified a need for the college's senior team to analyze issues and problems more as an executive team rather than a group of individuals in charge of different domains. By focusing on the college's best interests, the dean has fostered an esprit de corps on the senior team, which helped to stimulate a collective interrogation of priorities. Moreover, Dean Swift emphasized the importance of assembling balanced senior teams that feature different tolerances for ambiguity and styles of approaching problems. These two deans argue that stimulating dialogue requires deans to consider the composition and orientation of their senior teams before convening to explore problems.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

My findings from this chapter contribute to the literature in higher education in two important ways. First, scholars and former deans have implied relational conceptualizations of the deanship, arguing that deans should harness the "collective intelligence" of their administrative teams (Krahenbuhl, 2004), invite colleagues to explore problems together (Morris, 1981), interpret everyday meaning across their colleges (Tierney, 1989) and serve as the "hub" of their college's communication

network (Morris, 1981). The lesson from the literature is that deans lead through collaborating with their colleagues as well as framing and focusing attention on issues and problems. Yet these observers offer few details about how deans perform this interpretive and relational work.

My findings begin to bridge these gaps. At Sprawling University, some of the profiled academic deans collaborated with their senior teams to fulfill an essential responsibility – shaping academic priorities during the annual budget review. As noted in Chapter 7, research on academic deans has not explored the relationship between deans and their senior teams, which typically include associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors. In Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, I demonstrated that deans often consulted with their senior teams to formulate academic priorities during the annual budget review. In this chapter, I further specify this collaborative work, describing how some of the profiled deans established and nurtured senior teams that were capable of helping them make sense of academic priorities during the annual budget review. The findings of this chapter, along with those from Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, advance the literature on academic deans by illustrating the significant extent to which academic deans collaborate with – even depend on – their senior teams to fulfill some of their most important responsibilities.

My findings underscore the social character of the deanship by specifying discursive practices that academic deans use to stimulate dialogue with their senior teams. The literature on academic deans not only ignores the important role that senior teams play in helping deans make sense of complex problems, but also the behaviors that deans enact to collaborate with their senior teams to perform this work. Some of the

profiled deans adopted specific discursive practices in hopes of stimulating dialogue with their senior teams, which in turn generated richer discussion of ideas for academic priorities and a collective sense of academic priorities. While Chapter 7 demonstrates that the deans who distributed authorship of the annual budget memo hoped to develop a collective sense of academic priorities, this chapter reveals the actual behaviors that deans enact in hopes of stimulating this collective sensemaking – withholding personal preferences, specifying issues and problems, inviting diverse perspectives, empowering disagreement, tempering turf distinctions and assembling balanced teams.

Second, my findings advance our understanding of the relationship between academic deans and their senior administrative teams. My findings expand Bensimon and Neumann's (1993) insights on the relational work of senior academic administrators. In particular, I identify and describe a specific set of behaviors that senior academic administrators enact to adopt more collaborative approaches to making sense of problems as a team. The extent to which deans demonstrate patience in disclosing their own perspective or invite a diverse set of perspectives across their senior teams, for example, presents a clearer articulation of how senior academic administrators can establish a collaborative and interactive environment with their senior teams. My findings also present a clearer set of recommendations for how senior academic administrators can orient their senior teams to engage in dialogue and stimulate collective sensemaking.

My findings also advance earlier research insights by conceptualizing senior teams as a sheltered forum for senior administrators and their colleagues. The extent to which deans who distributed authorship of the budget memo demonstrated candor and vulnerability in articulating their emerging and nascent impressions presents an important

caveat to previous insights about the social constraints felt by senior academic administrators. In his study of new college and university presidents, Smerek (2013) cautioned presidents about making public proclamations. The presidents in his study noted that their opinions and preliminary assessments were often “taken as *fait accompli*” (p. 392). One of the presidents explained, “I think out loud, and I learned, Boy, that can throw an organization into havoc ... all I was doing was brainstorming. So I had to learn not to brainstorm so much in public” (Smerek, 2013, p. 393).

This observation begs the question of what “in public” means for senior academic administrators such as deans, provosts and presidents. The profiled deans might very well agree with this president; the public presentations of Dean Austen and Dean Swift, for example, are more scripted than their comments during team meetings. These deans, however, would probably argue that meetings of the senior team are not a public space. Instead this sheltered forum affords a high level of collegiality and intimacy for deans and their colleagues. This conception of senior teams evokes Erving Goffman’s (1959) distinction of “front stage” and “back stage.” Meetings of senior administrative teams might best be conceptualized as the most public of back-stage spaces for academic administrators. In this forum, senior administrators know that they have to act like administrators – setting some form of an agenda, introducing discussion in some fashion, offering some form of recommendations and capturing some emerging sense of meaning.

In meetings with their senior teams, however, senior administrators such as academic deans can embrace a different character in subtle ways. They can be vulnerable, revealing some version of anxiety, confusion, frustration or uncertainty. They can sit back and learn from their colleagues, disappearing into the crowd to listen for minutes on

end. They can sound out their ideas to figure out what they think, but without the burden of their comments transcending into gospel. They can challenge colleagues without it feeling like a rebuke. Colleagues can challenge them without it feeling like an affront. In the setting of senior administrative teams, senior administrators such as academic deans and their colleagues conspire to prove Goffman (1959) wrong – the performers can stop giving expressions and can stop *giving* them off (p. 108).

My findings also deepen our understanding of sensemaking in organizations. First, my findings begin to advance an alternative framework for managerial sensegiving. Past research has emphasized influence in sensegiving; managers know the path they want to take and try to persuade individuals into adopting their preferred vision (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Rouleau and Balogun (2010), for example, found that two discursive activities – “setting the scene” and “performing the conversation” – are central to the sensegiving of managers. To perform conversations, managers crafted words and appropriated symbols that were associated with desired interpretations such as using “cost” to relate shifts in policies to the organization’s bottom-line culture. To set scenes, managers mobilized specific networks across the organization, assembling the right set of colleagues in forums to champion preferred interpretations of organizational change. The lesson for managers is that sensegiving entails a calculated and clever integration of conveying the right message to the right group at the right time in the right place.

My findings suggest a different orientation to sensegiving. If managers collaborate with their senior teams to more deeply explore issues and problems, then it becomes more difficult, if not impossible, to set the scene or perform the conversation in this fashion before collaborating and consulting with them. Instead a more collective

orientation to sensemaking warrants a more collective orientation to sensegiving. The nature of sensegiving begins to feel more dynamic and emergent because managers are leaning on their colleagues to help them make sense of issues and problems before guiding their colleagues toward a specific vision. Managers might not have scripted a vision to champion beyond insisting that the senior team should formulate some sort of approach to addressing an issue or problem. In fact, managers might not even know what to do before consulting their teams. From this orientation, the work of setting the scene entails establishing certain attitudes and expectations among of a group in hopes of stimulating dialogue while the work of performing the conversation includes enacting specific discursive behaviors in hopes of stimulating dialogue.

Second, this different orientation enhances our understanding of a key dimension of organizational sensemaking. As referenced in Chapter 2 and Chapter 7, Maitlis (2005) identified four different forms of organizational sensemaking. These forms are marked by differences in the extent to which managers “control” and “animate” sensemaking across their organizations. By control, she meant interactions among managers and stakeholders were not only “organized” and “systematic” – scheduled meetings, formal committees and planned events – but also conducted in private rather than in “open” public forums. This dimension of control illustrates the importance of creating forums for sensemaking. If managers want to stimulate guided organizational sensemaking, then they need to establish spaces that encourage sensemaking rather than leaving it to chance that certain individuals will engage each other to explore the meaning of certain issues and problems.

My findings suggest a qualification to this articulation of organizational sensemaking. In the context of senior administrative teams, the dimension of “control”

might be better characterized and understood as “direction.” The use of direction clarifies the role of managers in orchestrating these activities, evoking a less commanding image. Two musical references from organization theory help to illustrate this distinction. First, in relating jazz to organizational life, Hatch (1999) identifies the “head” as the central musical arrangement in jazz. The head is the focal point of a song, dictating its melody and rhythm, even as musicians improvise throughout the song. The sensitivity of jazz musicians – in particular, their ability to listen for open spaces, which bares the beat and reveals opportunities for solos – enables this minimalist structure to provide sufficient direction. This interplay embodies an intense form of collaboration due to the “intertwined listening and responding” among jazz musicians. Second, Eisenberg (1990) offers the notion of “jamming” as a loose framework for organizing as teams. Jamming stimulates “fluid behavioral coordination” by enabling improvisational license within structured activity. With jamming, musicians find themselves surrendering to the experience while also respecting its structure. “In a jam session, the players cooperate in the formulation of a joint, emergent vision” (Eisenberg, 1990, p. 151).

To stimulate collective sensemaking on senior administrative teams, senior managers such as academic deans act in terms of directing sensemaking more than controlling it. Managers do not need to impose an interpretation of reality on their teams. Instead managers direct the sensemaking of their team by providing a “head” such as articulating issues that need to be explored as a team and specifying the attitudes and expectations that could shape the team’s interrogation of these issues. The depiction “high control,” for example, seems to overstate the degree of control necessary for managers to foster a sense of collective purpose across an organization, at least among a

senior team. The deans who distributed authorship directed discussions of their senior teams during the annual budget review – and some even stimulated freer explorations that resembled the surrender of jamming – but these deans did not command, dictate or dominate discussions with their teams.

Third, my findings inform our understanding of the role of meetings on sensemaking in organizations, particularly among senior teams. In meetings, individuals often receive new information, which could trigger sensemaking. Schwartzman (1989) defined meetings as “the organization ... *writ small*” because it is in meetings where individuals “create and then discover the meaning of what it is they are doing and saying” (p. 39). Similarly, Weick (1995) deemed meetings as “the infrastructure that creates sense” because meetings are the space in which individuals “argue their way into a new sense” (p. 145). By “sounding out” their impressions, managers and their colleagues and subordinates use meetings to organize cues into sensible explanations (Huber & Daft, 1987). In meetings, managers talk to flesh out their hunches, assembling disparate pieces of the puzzle into a clear – or at least clearer – portrait.

A challenge with meetings, however, is that social and political constraints often undermine the potential effect of meetings as forums for sensemaking. Weick (1995) speculated that many meetings convened to address ambiguous problems prove futile because numerous factors, including “autocratic leadership, norms that encourage obedience, unwillingness to risk embarrassment by disagreeing with superiors, reluctance to admit that one has no idea what is going on,” stifle the pursuit of constructing meaning (p. 186). Moreover, meetings that are convened to explore ambiguous problems tend to be “messy.” “Too many cues and too many interpretations and too little closure persist



for too long when people try to discover what they really ought to be addressing and what kinds of understandings they need to negotiate” (Weick, 1995, p. 186). Managers, therefore, confront a conundrum: to make sense of complex problems, they need more varied insights, but the open-ended discussions that unearth these varied insights can feel like wild goose chases, which discourages managers from spending their precious time in these types of meetings.

In this chapter, I begin to reconcile this dilemma. My findings offer managers such as academic deans a discursive blueprint that could enrich sensemaking during meetings with their senior teams. The deans who distributed authorship of the annual budget memo espoused and enacted a relational approach to leading their senior teams, embodying many of the principles of dialogism and communicative action. Over time, these deans created an environment that encouraged open dialogue during meetings of their senior teams. By stimulating dialogue, these deans increased the likelihood that their senior teams would capture and consider a diversity of perspectives that generates richer understanding, which in turn could clarify interpretations of situations and inform potential courses of action. Managers can stimulate this form of collective sensemaking by demonstrating some restraint in offering their own perspective, mitigating the chances that their impressions will anchor the team's exploration of issues and problems. Managers can stimulate sensemaking by inviting a diverse set of perspectives, which gives voice to contrary and silent perspectives. By encouraging disagreement and debate, managers can amplify this effect of inviting diverse perspective. Managers can assemble senior teams that possess a balance of perspectives and feel empowered to contribute to discussion that extent beyond their immediate domain of responsibilities.

Over the past three chapters, I have explored the relationship between academic deans and their senior teams during the annual budget review. With these insights, I now turn my attention to examining the relationship between deans and the provost during the annual budget review in more detail. Deans at Sprawling University can surmise the provost's priorities from numerous interactions throughout the year, but the annual budget review is the primary mechanism by which they formally reflect and report on the extent to which their priorities for the college not only promote the college's academic mission, but also advance the university's broader priorities, as articulated by the provost. I explore this theme – how deans make sense of the provost's priorities for the university during the annual budget review – in Chapter 9.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **Making Sense of the Provost's Priorities During the Annual Budget Review:**

#### **Navigating Interdependence in Decentralized Budget Models**

##### **Introduction**

In decentralized, revenue-centered budget models, the locus of authority and responsibility for academic and fiscal affairs in colleges lies within the dean's office more than the provost's office. As compared to incremental budget models, deans become more like entrepreneurs who manage their colleges as chief executive officers and less like middle managers who implement the agendas of the provost or president (Curry, Law & Strauss, 2013). The role of senior central senior administrators shifts from managing specific budgetary inputs to monitoring the academic and financial outcomes of colleges and holding deans accountable for the performance of their colleges (Hearn et al, 2006; Lasher & Sullivan, 2005). A former senior central administrator who led the design and implementation of decentralized budget models at UCLA and the University of Southern California argues that the "trick" for provosts in these models is to establish an organization that is loosely coupled enough to leverage the benefits of "decanal entrepreneurship" yet tightly coupled enough to create a sense of a "bonding commonality" (Whalen, 1991, p. 194).

In these budget models, subvention is the mechanism by which provosts try to achieve this balance. Subvention, which is a block grant from the provost's office that is generated from "taxes" on revenues from all colleges in the university, has several purposes (Strauss, Curry & Whalen, 1996). First, the provost's office uses subvention to subsidize poorer colleges with revenues from richer colleges. At Sprawling University, the Addendum serves this function. Second, subvention provides provosts a mechanism for incentivizing colleges. The provost might want to reward colleges for improving academic quality, balancing budgets or advancing institutional goals; colleges that advance the institution's interests might secure additional spoils. Third, subvention serves as an investment fund. With these resources, provosts can provide seed funding to colleges for special initiatives. In these three ways, subvention offers a lever for senior central administrators to address the problem of "forging and holding the center" and promoting institutional and unit-specific objectives in decentralized, revenue-centered budget models (Strauss & Curry, 2002, p. 4).

This discussion of subvention raises important questions about the nature of the relationship between colleges and the provost's office in decentralized, revenue-centered budget environments. Scholars have yet to explore the use of subvention, but proponents of these budget models expect subvention to encourage interdependence between colleges and the provost's office (Curry, Law & Strauss, 2013). The provost's office depends on colleges to allocate their own resources in support of their own academic priorities, while colleges depend on the provost's office for supplemental resources to fund new initiatives. Subvention, however, could create a dependency relationship between colleges and the provost's office, especially if colleges have no other means of

securing resources to advance their priorities or even sustain their operations. Deans of poorer colleges are left to plead with their provost for additional funds. At the other extreme, subvention might even nudge colleges toward independence, particularly those with surpluses or bountiful opportunities for fundraising. Colleges that are flushed with resources might not need the provost's patronage to fund special projects.

In the current fiscal environment of declining resources, the competition for subvention funds among colleges in public universities is likely to increase over coming years. At Sprawling University, for example, the provost's office now has fewer resources to fund special initiatives in colleges than in the past, as explained in Chapter 4. Organization theory suggests that some colleges will be better positioned than others to secure these increasingly scarce resources. The colleges that advance the university's most important priorities are more likely to receive disproportionate shares of discretionary resources from the provost's office. This concept is a central tenet of resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) advanced earlier research on the distribution of power within organizations (Crozier, 1964; Hickson et al, 1971; Perrow, 1970; Thompson, 1967) to demonstrate how subunits that solve their organization's most pressing problems – or “cope with the critical organizational contingencies” (p. 455) – acquire more power in organizations and leverage this power to acquire a disproportionate share of organizational resources. Salancik and Pfeffer (1974), for example, found that the power of academic departments at the University of Illinois was best predicted by a department's proportion of external grant funding and the department's national prestige because these resources were essential to the university's survival.

The effectiveness of subvention, therefore, depends on the ability of provosts to signal this relationship between discretionary resources and institutional priorities and the ability of academic deans to make sense of their provost's signals. I have conceptualized this interpretive work as a sensemaking exercise for deans. During an annual budget review, for example, an academic dean might extract cues from their institution's environment (or context), including their provost's impressions of academic and fiscal priorities. A dean might juxtapose these cues with their past experiences to develop plausible definitions of institutional priorities. These interpretations might then inform a dean's articulation (or enactment) of their college's priorities in budget documents for the provost's office. The provost would provide feedback on these priorities, which would validate a dean's interpretation of their college's and institution's priorities, thus crystalizing understanding, or contradict their interpretation, thus stimulating renewed search for understanding. This conceptualization begins to illustrate how deans might make sense of the provost's priorities for the university during an annual budget review.

In this chapter, I explore the extent to which the university's priorities, especially the provost's interpretations of the university's priorities, affect how the six profiled deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review at Sprawling University. While the profiled deans can ascertain the provost's priorities from numerous interactions, including one-on-one meetings with the provost and during meetings of the Dean's Council, I found that the annual budget review is the most important opportunity every year for deans to formally reflect on the academic and financial performance of their college and report on this performance to the provost, as examined in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6. In the following section, I explore how the profiled deans shape academic

priorities during the annual budget review, particularly how the deans make sense of the provost's priorities for the university. In the subsequent discussion, I summarize four ways that deans align their college's priorities to the provost's interpretations of the university's priorities and examine the politics of sensemaking during the annual budget review in decentralized budget models.

## **Findings**

### **Dean Austen**

#### *Securing the Provost's Confidence*

During the budget review, Dean Austen courts the provost's support for the college's academic priorities. "I consider it my job to get the provost to buy into my world view of my college." For the dean, the budget review offers a chance to renew the college's priorities with the provost. "It is an opportunity for all of us to reaffirm it. Really, I see it as an opportunity to say, 'Here is what we are doing. Here is why we are doing it. Here is the progress we have made. Here are the barriers we face.'"

Dean Austen considers the budget memo central to this endeavour, describing it as a critical "mechanism" for educating the provost about the college's priorities. "The audience for that document is first and foremost the provost and the many who surround the provost." By writing a detailed budget memo, she hopes to stimulate a positive discussion with the provost during the budget conference. In fact, the provost has complimented her on the college's budget memos. "If we approach [authorship] with a notion that we're going to express something serious [in the budget memo], we have a more meaningful budget conference."

In the budget memo, Dean Austen appeals to the provost's analytical disposition by reporting considerable quantitative data. "Most of us were scientists of one form or another and are very evidence based. I really think of [the memo] as presenting a case supported by evidence. I do think about what is going to be persuasive to [the provost]." She frames the memo as a "scientific article" more than a bureaucratic "form." "Here is my hypothesis, here is my evidence, here is my conclusion, discussion ... We are talking scientist to scientist. That is how I think about it." In the memo, for example, Dean Austen quantifies numerous accomplishments, ranging from enrolment in new degree programs to increased investment in research. Similarly, she articulates the college's activities in "lay terms," avoiding "jargon" such as college-specific acronyms because the college's activities are not "self-evident" outside of the college. "It's not a marketing plan. That just doesn't work."

#### *Advancing the Provost's Academic Agenda*

In the budget memo, Dean Austen emphasizes the college's activities that align with the provost's priorities. She believes that the provost's instructions for the budget memo provide clear "signaling" about the university's priorities. In particular, the dean believes the section on "strategic priorities" offers a clear sense of the provost's agenda. "The stuff that I see highlighted in [the memo instructions] is a signal." She attends to these cues while writing the memo and preparing for the budget conference. "There is a section in here that says ... 'describe your plans that relate to two of the provost's initiatives' ... I understand that as a signal. Of all that stuff, I should pay attention to this and so, I do take that as a signal."



Not surprisingly, Dean Austen emphasized the overlap between the college's activities and the provost's two strategic priorities – experiential learning and globalization – in the college's budget memo. The opening sentence of the dean's response for this section reads, “[The College] has been a leader in [experiential] learning.” The response then details one of the college's signature experiential programs, mentioning some of the issues explored by students and the number of projects that are located around the world. In this section, Dean Austen also references an initiative that integrates experiential learning and globalization. “One possibility, which is still in the exploratory stage, is to combine a global experience with an [experiential] project.”

The associate deans notice the dean's attempts to align the college's activities with the provost's agenda. One associate dean believes that Dean Austen aims to appeal to the provost's agenda far more than her predecessor. “At its simplest, if the boss is in favor of the direction that you're moving, then they're more likely to give you support to do so. ... we need whatever support we can get. It serves our purpose.” In this respect, the associate dean argues that Dean Austen's approach to the budget review has helped the college rebound from deficit. “It has made a big difference here at the college that we have someone who ... is looking to align with what the university wants and what the provost wants because then that does open up more resources.”

Despite this alignment, another associate dean argues that the senior team does not feel constrained by the dean's approach. “It's typically not where things start, so it's much more likely that we'll have our discussions ... because we're operating in our space and the provost isn't talking specifically about the space, right?” But then Dean Austen and members of the senior team will “unwind” or consider how the provost could

contribute resources to an initiative. The senior team, for example, considered the provost's perspective while designing a new undergraduate degree program, but not while debating the optimal enrollment for the college's signature graduate program. "When we were [debating the new program], there was a fair amount of discussion about the provost and the broader campus concerns for [our discipline]. That was a place where we were very much concerned about the provost."

### **Dean Joyce**

#### *Embracing the Provost's Fiscal Agenda*

Dean Joyce describes a "coevolution" of his and the provost's fiscal agendas. In recent years, the provost has "clearly communicated" that finances are "getting tighter" across campus. "They had been getting more focused on managing the university's balances and longer-term strategic resource planning than the provost's office used to be. They've been each year signaling an increase in attention to that. I've been hearing that." With increased focus on resource planning, the provost has begun to pose more scrutinizing questions to deans about their budgets. "They've been asking questions designed to encourage us to do [resource planning] and to get the information they want from us about how we're doing it and what the long-term plans are."

The provost's orientation mirrors Dean Joyce's own perspective. "It happens to be consistent with the way I see things, but it signaled to me it's not only a good idea, it's an important idea." The dean has been staying "on top of how things have been evolving" in the provost's office, anticipating the "right time" for the college to make its "move." "I've been adapting to that ... it fits with my own approach to things. It helped prioritize

and put more emphasis on it than I might otherwise have placed. This year, I think we just sort of nailed it.” A member of the senior team credits Dean Joyce with tracking the provost’s fiscal agenda, arguing, he “has been doing a good job of reading the signals and getting signs from the provost’s office about what the priorities are.”

In response to the provost’s signals, Dean Joyce has pushed to integrate the college’s academic and financial planning. “I’ve moved towards a greater focus on our budget planning, making it longer term and connecting it to our strategic planning more closely.” In the most recent budget memo, Dean Joyce coupled academic and financial planning in “a much more explicit sense.” “I think we really coalesced on, well we’re coalescing, we’re not quite done yet, but we’ve really come to the point now where we’ve got a reasonable sense of our strategic vision for the college and how we might engage resources we have to accomplish that.” The dean takes pride in the college adapting to the provost’s perspective more quickly than other colleges. “I think we’re just a bit ahead of the curve as far as ... colleges go in catching on to what the provost wants and executing on it. It was a matter of staying on top of things as the provost’s office developed their view about resource planning.”

The senior team’s collaborative work exploring strategic investments illustrates this calibration with the provost’s fiscal agenda. In response to the provost’s calls to spend the college’s surplus, Dean Joyce and the senior team have identified and examined opportunities for investing the surplus, including stimulating faculty research and expanding international opportunities for students. The dean argues, “all the pieces came together” this year, “after gathering input and information and developing the [senior] team, and actually expanding this to a team-based planning exercise rather than

doing it mostly by myself.” The dean frames investing the surplus as an opportunity to advance his academic vision for the college while demonstrating a commitment to the provost’s fiscal agenda. “We’re ready to launch the strategic initiatives, and because we do have the funds internally, I’m planning to use those, which I’m expected to do.”

Dean Joyce’s exacting approach during the annual budget review further demonstrates his attention to the provost’s fiscal orientation. First, the dean and the finance director want to submit accurate financial reports because they worry that administrators in the provost’s office would discover discrepancies. The finance director explains, “the debits and credits ... connect to an integrated financial picture with numbers ... it has to match the story. It *has* to,” adding, “If you are saying something in your memo and your numbers contradict it, the [provost’s office] will catch it.” To ensure accuracy, the dean has numerous individuals review financial data. “I definitely shoot it to the finance director ... because I want to make sure *I* didn’t make any mistakes.” Second, Dean Joyce stresses the importance of “presenting” the college’s accounting and “calculations” in intuitive language and tables for the provost’s office. “We try to be as clear as we can and as helpful as we can and as correct as we can.”

#### *Advancing the Provost’s Academic Agenda*

Dean Joyce still aims to impress the provost during the budget review, even if the Campus Budget model affords him significant autonomy. “The university has a very decentralized budget model ... nonetheless, there are non-trivial central resources that, from time to time, colleges need to successfully make client claims on if they’re going to succeed.” Dean Joyce, for example, anticipates needing additional resources from the

provost's office to implement the college's new academic initiatives. These supplemental resources, however, are increasingly difficult to secure. "If there are certain strategic investments, I need help from the provost. I'm competing for that with other colleges and there's a marketplace to it, but there's also politics to it."

During the annual budget review, Dean Joyce remains "very aware" of the provost's priorities. The budget memo, for example, "is really, primarily for the provost." "It's probably 90 percent for the provost and 10 percent the vice provost ... not really anybody else." While drafting the goals for budget memo, he emphasizes the "common ground" between the provost's agenda and the college's activities. "What's the common language? What are the common interests? What are we trying to accomplish? I view communication as a two-way street, so my goals for that communication depend on what I think the goals for the audience are ... the common goals." The finance director explains that the dean organizes the budget memo to stimulate discussion with the provost about the college's goals. "[The memo] laid out exactly what both of them want for the college, which ties to mission, which ties to the vision."

With this perspective, Dean Joyce tries to frame the college's activities as advancing the provost's academic agenda. The college's global initiatives illustrate this alignment. The dean has adopted the provost's emphasis on expanding the institution's global reach. "There have been a lot of discussions about increasing the globalization of the university. It's been one of the priorities of the current provost." In response, the dean has prioritized the college's global programs. The college, for example, increased expenditures for international internships and secured funds from a campus-wide global initiative to hire a new professor. These efforts created educational opportunities for

students, but also demonstrated a commitment to the provost's agenda. "It is true that I knew that – that's part of the reason we were pursuing it." A member of the senior team recalls that the dean "wanted to get behind" international internships because "he was hearing that the university is really pushing on the global front."

Dean Joyce believes the provost acknowledges and appreciates this overlap. "The provost is very pleased at how coherent our program is and how well it aligns with the university's initiatives." Due to this alignment, the provost "encouraged" the dean to request supplemental funds during the budget review. "We're going to seek some provost's initiative money that supports some of that we otherwise might not be able to afford." Ultimately, the college received an "infusion" of over one million dollars for international activities. One administrator in the college credits the dean's ability to "plant seeds" with the provost for receiving this supplemental funding.

This alignment between the college's priorities and the university's agenda has elevated the college's profile within the provost's office. According to Dean Joyce, the provost applauds the college's direction, including its global initiatives. "All of that was in the context with knowing this was a university priority and that even though we're a small college and we're not ready to launch a big program internationally, it was a good idea for us to start out in that direction." During the budget review, the provost also advised the dean to seek supplemental funds to secure more space to support the college's strategic investment in faculty research. "I found out that we're going to have to spend more on space than I originally thought – we had less than we thought – and several of the initiatives we've planned are very consistent with university level initiatives."

Due to this alignment, Dean Joyce not surprisingly characterized the college's annual budget conference in glowing terms. "To be honest, it was quite short and it was basically a love fest." He takes pride in describing the conference as "very positive." The conferences are scheduled for 60 minutes, but this past conference only lasted 30 minutes. Dean Joyce described this year's budget conference as "probably the easiest" of his tenure. Before "the defense" with the provost, administrators in the provost's office complimented the dean and the finance director on the college's budget memo, saying that it had been "prepared excellently." The dean proudly notes that an administrator in the provost's office "said it was one of the better prepared budget analysis and also one of the better articulated sets of strategic priorities, so they were very happy with what we did." In fact, the provost "had almost no questions" because the budget memo outlined the college's priorities in detail. "There were a few minor questions, I would say arguably as much as anything because they had to ask *something*."

### **Dean Conrad**

#### *Defending the College's Direction*

Dean Conrad leverages the budget memo to stimulate "a dialogue" with the provost about the college's academic and fiscal priorities. The budget memo defines "where the college is going to go academically" as well as the college's "financial fences." "The process is really to get a sense of really what our needs are, what our expectations are." In the budget memo, the dean provides a "rationale" for – "defends" – the college's priorities. "What we want to do is make sure that [administrators in the provost's office] understand why we do what we do."

In the budget memo, the dean frames the college's priorities as a "work in progress," explaining "what was accomplished" and "what we failed to accomplish." The evolution of college's curriculum reform, for example, has been profiled in numerous budget memos. This defense also includes "an overview of progress" on fixing the structural deficit in the dean's office. One administrator in the college characterizes the deficit as "more than modest," quantifying it as more than a million dollars. The college's finance director expresses frustration over the deficit, confessing, "I've never turned in [an annual] budget with a positive balance. It has always been a negative. It's shown that we're always going to be short each year." Yet Dean Conrad emphasizes that the college has strengthened its budget, arguing, "there has been no growth of the deficit, and if anything, it's been whittled down." He believes that the provost and other administrators in the provost's office "understand" the college's issues.

Dean Conrad stresses that the college's fiscal "dilemma" is "never going to really correct itself" because expenditures "keep going up for whatever reason." "It's never going to go completely away until there's been either a large infusion of resources or .. until we change our business model." To fund new ventures, the college might need to curtail or even eliminate activities. "If we're going to continue to be at the top of our game, as we string on things, we're going to have to make some difficult decisions about stopping some things." In fact, the budget memo mentions the college's "financial sustainability." It, for example, references contingencies for funding faculty positions such as balancing the "number of faculty in the [college]" and "eliminating positions" if the college cannot generate new revenues to offset expenditures.



Despite these fiscal struggles, Dean Conrad characterizes the provost as “very supportive” of the college’s academic priorities. The dean has good reason to sense this support – the provost has treated the college “very well” during past budget reviews. “They’ve been very generous with us when I’ve needed resources and I’ve had a compelling argument in support of it. They’ve come through with resources.” The dean credits investments from the provost’s office as helping to improve the college’s educational programs. “I think [the provost] has had a very clear understanding of where the college has come ... how far it’s come ... and that’s largely because [the provost] has provided resources above and beyond what we typically get to advance our academic program.” While implementing the new curriculum, for example, associate deans and department chairs realized a need to upgrade classroom technology to create the desired “educational environment”; during a previous budget review, the dean requested, and received, supplemental funds from the provost’s office to fund this technology. In Dean Conrad’s experience, the provost provides additional resources if there is a compelling rationale. “If the provost can be shown that what we’re doing is unique and different and really creative and really leading the pack, we’ll get the resources for it ... We have to show them that what we’re doing is really adding value” to the university.

### **Dean Huxley**

#### *Learning the Provost’s Language*

Dean Huxley explains that an important aspect of the college’s turnaround has been learning “how to communicate” with the provost during the annual budget review. One of the provost’s legacies has been shifting the “climate of the leadership” across

campus to focusing more on quantitative outcomes. The provost has “been able to basically stir people into operating the way that makes sense for [the provost].” On one hand, Dean Huxley avoids leveling a “value judgment” about this shift because the provost’s “very different approach” was “warranted” due to deteriorating economic conditions. On the other hand, this shift unsettles the dean because the provost has molded “a different kind of institution” that privileges “a different kind of leadership.” “The atmosphere here is very different. It's just sort of an entrepreneurial, and I would say market-driven kind of atmosphere.” The provost, for example, has “made it very clear” that the provost’s office does not want to hear “pleas for help” from deans.

While the provost espouses a “market model,” Dean Huxley, along with the college’s administrators and faculty, prefer to work within a “subsidy” model. “We're accustomed to pleading our case, trying to make arguments why the discipline is important.” The college’s faculty are not “looking for a hand out,” but they do not envision themselves as competing “in a marketplace” for resources. The provost’s logic “does not come naturally” for the dean or most individuals in the college. “It involves a big shift in thinking for everybody here,” adding, “We have to work on it, we have to continually work on trying to figure out how to do that.”

For Dean Huxley, the challenge has been both understanding and meeting the provost’s expectations. First, he needed to learn the provost’s “mindset.” The dean prefers to write the budget memo as a “narrative” about the college, articulating a “very powerful argument” about the discipline’s “value” in “the world, to humanity and specifically to [the university]” and “finding the right language to express these ideas.” This narrative style was not problematic for past provosts or “regimes,” but it frustrates

the current provost. Instead the provost wants “a very concise sort of bulleted presentation of ideas,” according to the dean. “The word ‘concrete’ is almost a joke. [The provost is] clear ... ‘concrete results’ ... wants to know what outcomes are ... wants concrete proposals.” Dean Huxley divulges the provost’s typical critique of his narratives – “‘Where’s the concrete? Where’s the vision?’” Over time, Dean Huxley has realized that his style lacks the “kind of zinger” that satisfies or “moves” the provost.

Second, the college’s work is difficult to describe using the provost’s “language.” “The language and presentation style was a challenge for us, but also from a content standpoint, it’s not just the world we operate in ... in many cases, I feel like we simply can’t do it ... It’s very difficult.” The provost prefers “distinctive” initiatives, but Dean Huxley counters, “we are not engineers” and “not doing engineering kinds of things.” The scholarship of the college’s faculty, for example, does not stimulate innovation. “It’s not where we live. It’s not the value we contribute to the institution.” The dean elaborates, “I think engineers in this climate, with this leadership at the university, that’s the way of thinking. It’s positive. It’s upbeat. It’s *can* do. It’s problem solving. It’s concrete.” Unfortunately, the dean finds it “very challenging” to shape the college’s work into this “mold.” Dean Huxley knows the provost’s language, but the college’s work cannot always be translated into this preferred form. “Frankly, we’re constrained. The opportunities for us to move in that direction are limited ... it’s not easy for us to do.”

### *Modeling the Provost’s Logic*

Despite these frustrations, Dean Huxley has learned “how to try to communicate in the best way” with the provost through the experience of drafting budget memos and

preparing for budget conferences. He tries to orient administrators and faculty to the provost's style during the budget review. "I think that's partly a function of having been trained or shaped, having our thinking shaped by the climate." He refers to "a training process" that happens with the provost. "You learn, you have to learn how the provost thinks about these things and it gets passed along." The dean helps others "frame" and "reshape" proposals to align with the provost's expectations and "advocate for positions." "It's really getting people ... in a mind of being strategic in asks." He stresses, "we all have to be thinking" about the provost's "mantra" – "help yourself and we'll help you."

This mindset is especially important when the senior team asks the provost's office for supplemental resources during the budget review. "We have to find ways that our asks get framed in a way that's congenial with the climate of the institution." In this respect, Dean Huxley compares the provost to a high-profile donor. "We have to think strategically about how they're going to link institutional priorities and how they're going to appeal to the people who we're going to for funding. In that way, the provost really is similar to a major donor ... We have to think about what's going to serve his or her interest when we make an appeal."

While meeting with members of the senior team to finalize the budget memo, Dean Huxley demonstrates this sensitivity to the provost's preferences. The draft memo featured a request for supplemental resources to fund a conference on global outreach. The dean had asked a senior professor to draft a proposal for the memo; this professor situated the program in a developed country, despite the dean wanting to target a developing country. When discussion turned to this conference, Dean Huxley tried to persuade his colleague to consider a different country. First, he emphasized the difficulty

of securing any supplemental funds, especially for a conference hosted in the proposed country. “In this fiscal context, it will be difficult to get money for this.” The dean then mentioned the fiscal stress felt across campus, asserting, “*everything* feels uphill” and “all bets are off for the budget” because the provost was “bracing” for the trustees to approve only a modest increase in tuition.

Second, Dean Huxley shifted discussion to exploring whether the outreach conference could be held in a country that would be more attractive to the provost. During this discussion, the dean identified the university’s global priorities; he even asked his assistant to call the president’s office to confirm the countries that the president and provost planned to visit over the next year. Dean Huxley pressed the professor’s “flexibility” in changing the location of the conference. The dean argued that the college would more likely receive funds if it organized a conference in a country of interest to the president or provost. “In order to get the provost to cough up, we will have a better shot – it feels as if we need to align with institutional imperatives. Connecting to institutional imperatives, we would have a better shot.” Ultimately, the professor agreed to edit the proposal to include developing countries as potential locations for the conference.

Members of the senior team believe Dean Huxley’s efforts to adopt the provost’s perspective benefit the college. The finance director believes the senior team has become more skilled at framing funding requests in the budget memo. “I think that’s been one of our problems in the past ... I don’t believe that we have spent enough time justifying our requests.” In retrospect, the finance director believes the college could have “done more due diligence” during past budget reviews, highlighting unsuccessful proposals. With the dean’s coaching, however, the senior team now adopts a more sophisticated approach

during the budget review. “[Administrators in the provost’s office] are very willing to entertain our request or suggestion . . . if it’s backed up with a philosophy or data.”

By authoring the budget memo as a team, Dean Huxley translates how the college’s priorities fit within the university’s larger agenda. An associate dean explains that the senior team harmonizes the college’s priorities with the provost’s priorities during the annual budget review. “It gave us an opportunity to say, these are the initiatives of the college, of the university in that that the university wants us to be engaged more deeply in certain areas. How do we make them priorities for us? How do we need to expand at these areas?” This associate dean further explains the exercise as discerning “the macro” perspective of the provost and then charting “how to get to the micro” perspective in the college.

#### *Fixating on the Provost’s Priorities*

Despite Dean Huxley’s commitment to collaborating with the senior team, the finance director underscores the dean’s central role during the budget review. “I think Dean Huxley is the one who sets the tone for things, essentially.” The dean engages the senior team during the budget review, but authorship of the budget memo still “focuses on the dean.” Members of the senior team want to know how the dean “sees things” and “what he wants to play out” before articulating their preferences. In particular, members of the senior team want to know Dean Huxley’s interpretation of the provost’s preferences or “the way to approach [headquarters].”

The finance director argues that this hesitation illustrates an enduring legacy of the college’s deficit – members of the senior team assume that they need to align the

college's priorities with the provost's priorities. The assistant deans and associate deans "are ready" to explore the college's priorities, but they do not "function quite the way" they might if the college was "flushed financially." In fact, the finance director describes a sense of dependence. "We have been supplicants ... because we don't have enough money coming in. We needed to look at the provost's office to help us out." He explains,

A lot of our budget document, the way it's organized, it tries to anticipate how certain things might play [at headquarters]. Since the dean is the only one having those conversations with the provost and anybody else down there, again, the senior team looks to [Huxley] like, 'What have you heard? What do you want us to tell you?'

The finance director believes members of the senior team are "prepared to provide information" during the budget review, "but they really need [the dean's] spin" on the provost's priorities. "It's all still very tied to the dean and, again, the specific circumstances under which we find ourselves. It's not knowing what things resonate both to the dean and with the provost's office."

The college's outreach programs offer an illustration of this fixation on the provost's preferences. An associate dean describes the pull of the provost's priorities on the college's own sense of direction, saying,

That's why the dean wants us to expand on those areas because he sees that, first of all, for him personally, it's an important thing. He believes in it, but he also sees that there are signals coming from central administration that they want the university as a whole to break down these borders between the academy and the larger community.

The finance director echoes this observation about the dean's positioning of the college's outreach programs. "Strategically, a good thing to talk about are outreach programs."

This focus on outreach, however, has proven frustrating for Dean Huxley during the budget review. The finance director believes that the dean receives “a very mixed message” from the provost about the importance of outreach programs. This mixed message “makes it really hard to know what we really ought to be doing.” During a recent budget conference, the provost argued that the college was pursuing too many outreach programs. “On one hand, you hear this idea that you should be doing more outreach .... Be out there. Get your [work] out there ... into the community. We would like to see you do these things.” But the provost also questions whether the college can pursue numerous outreach activities given its delicate fiscal situation. “In last year's budget conference, we kind of got nailed by the provost for doing too much ... because we don't have the resources.”

The dean's approach to authoring the annual budget memo offers another illustration of the college's preoccupation with the provost's preferences. In recent years, the finance director has solicited ideas for the budget memo from members of the senior team in numerous ways. During one recent budget review, Dean Huxley and the finance director asked everyone to review a draft memo in advance of meeting as a team. The finance director recalls the intent of this approach, “We'd have a senior team meeting and things would be decided and I'd go back and do my edits and send out a thing to be re-edited by everybody else.” But this process “just didn't work out very well” because “everyone's going in so many directions.” The finance director explains (while chuckling), “as it turns out ... Nobody looked at the document when I sent it out.” As a result, the dean had to summarize the draft memo before asking for the team's feedback on the memo's content.



In response, the finance director devised an alternative plan for generating ideas from members of the senior team. To compile input for the next budget review, he and an associate dean interviewed members of the senior team about their ideas for the memo. The two of them would then integrate the ideas into a draft for the team to review. The finance director explains the rationale for this revised approach, saying,

The [senior team] has other things on their minds ... What I learned from this process was, instead of sending out a document and inviting people to comment, what [we] decided to do ... is we meet with the person who's responsible for the diversity section say, and say, we're sending this out to you the night before, start thinking about it because we're going to sit down and meet with you and we're going to take notes ... about what you say and we're going to capture everything in that one-hour meeting.

By interviewing assistant and associate deans, the finance director anticipated generating more descriptive and refined accounts of initiatives for the budget memo. Members of the senior team could provide “baseline information” during interviews, but also refine their contributions when the team met to discuss the draft memo.

Despite this sensible rationale, the interviews did not generate more descriptive accounts of initiatives. The finance director confesses, “as it turns out, that really wasn't how it happened.” “We had our little interviews with [members of the senior team] and we just kind of said, ‘Lay out your concerns. Tell us the story that you think ought to be told, and then talk about that as much as you can.’” Interviews followed a frustrating pattern: the finance director or associate dean would ask someone for their ideas and they would counter with a question about the dean’s preferences for the memo. “They would say, ‘What do you want us to talk to you about?’ and we would have to say, ‘We don't know what [the dean] wants us to talk about.’” Ultimately, the interviews did not provide richer content for the memo. “Even our individual discussions don't illuminate a lot of

things. What happens is really essentially the same thing that has happened for the ... years that I've been involved in it, however we've approached it.”

### **Dean Stowe**

#### *Discounting the Budget Review*

By design, Dean Stowe excludes other administrators and faculty during the annual budget review because she discounts the importance of the budget memo and budget conference. In the dean’s opinion, the budget memo is not a “binding” agreement with the provost. “In many ways, it's not very important.” She cannot justify asking associate deans to take time away from their other responsibilities during the heart of the academic year to help write a document that means so little to the college. “Because of the timing of the memo, if I were going to be looping a lot of other people into it, I would be doing it during an extremely busy part of the year.”

Dean Stowe’s doubting perspective reflects her experiences with the provost during past budget reviews. Over time, she has realized that “the budget review is really a bottom line review.” With the college reporting a surplus, which the dean considers “unusual” on campus, the provost does not prioritize the college’s budget memo or budget conference. “If you're doing solidly ... they ask a few questions about the memo. But they only really care if there's an area we're having problems.” Dean Stowe is surprised that other deans express so much anxiety over the budget review. “Given how much formality and structure, and angst I hear other deans expressing about this document and this process and ‘have you had your meeting yet?’” In contrast, her budget conference never has “any consequential end.” “Nothing ever happens at our meeting.”

Dean Stowe describes the futility of preparing for budget conferences. “Every year, my [finance] officer who comes with me, wants me to be all prepped and I’m usually prepped to the t – and I never get asked anything that’s even challenging.” The dean, for example, cannot recall anyone from the provost’s office ever questioning her to explain differences between projected expenditures in the budget memo and actual expenditures over the year. “I’ve never had a time where [administrators in the provost’s office] sat and said ‘it looks like you did something different than you said you were going to do.’ I’m prepared to talk about that, but I’ve never been asked it.” Another administrator in the college offers a more biting critique of the budget review, calling it “totally pointless” because the provost rarely probes “exact figures” in the memo. Instead the provost asks “inexact” questions – “so, tell me what’s happening in [the college]?” By asking vague questions, this administrator argues that the provost invites “diatribes” from deans “about all of the things happening in the college.”

Due to these frustrations, Dean Stowe actually questioned the provost about the purpose of the budget review. “I confronted [the provost] about the budget meeting ... I said ‘does anybody actually care what’s happening with the college’s budget?’ I mean I come in, I tell you things, everybody always looks at me and says ‘fine, fine – spend more money.’” The provost’s response surprised – and frustrated – the dean. She recalls the provost responding, “we need to do due diligence, we want you to be successful, but [the college] doesn’t have the same worry that [the liberal arts college] or [the engineering college] has ... my responsibility is for the whole university.” Dean Stowe acknowledges the provost’s point – the enrollment of other colleges dwarfs her college’s enrollment – but she felt “nonplussed” by the provost’s “moment of candor.” She realized

that the provost would not interrogate her during the budget review as long as the college maintained a surplus and she did not make a “horrific mistake.”

Dean Stowe’s experience with subsequent budget conferences only reinforced this belief. During a recent conference, for example, the provost recommended that the dean narrow her goals for the college. “The provost and the vice provost told me ‘too many priorities,’ which is probably accurate.” Dean Stowe concedes that she could have presented a more focused set of priorities in the budget memo. “We have a short-term game plan in two or three years. But we don’t have that kind of long-term plan ... and we’ve had a lot of ideas, but we don’t have an orchestrated plan for that.” In response, she heeded the provost’s advice. Over the next year, she focused on three priorities – curricular reform, faculty hires and scholarship support. During the next budget conference, she referenced the provost’s earlier call to “translate” her ideas into priorities for the budget memo. But the provost and other administrators in the provost’s office did not notice. “So, I responded to it this year ... but nobody seemed to care.”

### *Satisfying the Provost’s Fiscal Agenda*

Despite her doubts about the budget review, Dean Stowe has learned to leverage it to justify her academic priorities for the college. During recent budget review, the provost pressed the dean to spend the college’s surplus. “We were under strict instructions to start spending [surplus] funds because you shouldn’t have those funds sitting around.” In response, Dean Stowe chose to fund the new centers of excellence with the surplus. “I’m letting myself spend a little more and drive [the surplus] down, which is basically what’s giving me the resources for the centers of excellence.” By investing the college’s

surplus, Dean Stowe hopes to “look like a good citizen.” The dean says the provost “liked” her funding plan for the centers of excellence.

Dean Stowe, however, disagrees with the provost’s timeframe for spending the surplus. They have “not reached a consensus” on the pace of spending, which was exposed during a recent budget review. “I’m actually dragging my heels on that ... Not in a hurry to spend the money.” The provost wants the dean to spend these funds over the next two years. “The provost and vice provost both pushed hard on how big our carry over is and didn’t accept my defense of wanting to keep it that large.” The dean not only wants to “keep a buffer” for the college, but also hopes to “draw [surplus funds] down very slowly and with an eye to investment.” The centers of excellence, for example, require modest investments over numerous years rather than an infusion of funds for one or two years. “I can’t do them ... without spending at a level that I can’t support after the first couple of years.” Ultimately, the provost “agreed” with the dean’s “plea,” applauding her “conservative” impulse while reiterating the need to spend surpluses.

### **Dean Swift**

#### *Recommending Solutions to Campus Problems*

For Dean Swift, the audience for the budget memo is the provost. “We’re writing this for the provost, for sure.” An administrative director in the college describes the dean as “very alert” to the priorities of the university’s senior leadership during the budget review. Despite this attention, Dean Swift does not want the senior team to fixate on the provost’s preferences. “It’s not as if we’re thinking, ‘oh gee, if this vice provost looks at this, how is it going to strike that person? Somehow we have to word things in a

particular way' or whatever. I'd say we give basically zero consideration to that." He does not want the team to feel beholden to provost's priorities. "I don't think we pull out a document or look something over and decide, 'Okay. This year we're going to need to do this, this, and that because [the provost] said so.' I don't think there's a lot of that."

Instead Dean Swift and the senior team focus more on featuring initiatives in the budget memo that could inform solutions to campus-wide problems. Some of the college's initiatives have evolved into university programs such as an interdisciplinary research initiative. "Some of [the initiatives] ... some of them turned out to be just great, unbelievable things, not just for [the college] but for the campus." In part, this success has stemmed from the dean's willingness to identify good ideas during the budget review and invest in them as pilot experiments. "If we see ... opportunities on a topic that we think could be really important for the future, for the college, for the university, we'll start pouring money into that."

Members of the senior team underscore this approach. One associate dean argues that the budget memo offers a formal opportunity for the senior team to recommend ideas to the provost's office for improving the university. "It's absolutely very well scripted. In some respects, it's almost a tail wagging the dog." The associate dean explains,

What I mean by that is we are using that document to try to showcase the college, but also try to influence the provost's thinking, to be frank. That we think these are the important things. We're going to answer in a certain way that says, 'Yes, we've answered your questions, but we've answered in a way that show you what we think are important for the university. If we were you, how we would proceed.'

An administrative director in the college echoes this point, arguing that the senior team welcomes opportunities to incubate ideas for the university. "It's such a win-win for

everyone that, why not, after someone proves it, and it just happens that we like to do those things at the college.”

During the budget review, the senior team identified numerous initiatives in the college that could help address problems across campus. First, the college has implemented several initiatives for increasing faculty and student diversity. An associate dean argued that the provost’s office could learn from the college’s efforts to recruit more students of color, including hosting students on campus and introducing them to alumni. “We tell [the provost’s office] these things, a) because it’s a little bit of bragging to the boss, there’s no doubt about it, and b) it is like we’re doing this. It works. Other places on the campus could be doing this, too.” Similarly, an administrative director believes these diversity programs could serve as a blueprint for the rest of campus. “That’s the piece ... I think that we have some really creative approaches that could eventually be used at the university level.”

The senior team also championed expanding mental health services for students. During a team meeting about the budget memo, an associate dean argued that the college should recommend increasing awareness of this problem across campus. This administrator proposed asking the provost’s office to increase its investments in these services because of the "dramatic increase" in the number of students in the college who were seeking services. "I cannot believe we're the only college confronting this problem. There's just no way. We might be better at identifying it." An administrative director echoed this assessment. In response, Dean Swift framed this addition to the budget memo as a "request for attention.” The dean explained, "this is not a request for money at this point, because we don't really know ... this is a request for study and attention. I think

there should be some form of campus-wide study, for sure ... There is some great work [on campus], but it is not a comprehensive system."

Despite their desire to recommend local answers as potential solutions to campus concerns during the budget review, the senior team does not necessarily formulate priorities with this objective in mind. "I think we first focus on our own community, small community in [in the college]," according to one administrative director. "I think when you're hatching plans, it's not as big of a piece." Yet once the senior team learns from its experiments, the dean and the team begin to explore whether the project might benefit other colleges. This administrator explains, "you start realizing your plans, then you realize how transformational some of these things could be," adding "then we see from the successes how it can really change everyone."

### **Chapter Discussion**

In this chapter, I explore the extent to which the provost's priorities for Sprawling University affect how the six profiled deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review. Most of the deans privilege the provost's preferences during the budget review, identifying the provost and other administrators in the provost's office as the primary audience for the annual budget memo. With the Campus Budget, academic deans serve as the chief academic officer and chief budgetary officer of their colleges, but the provost remains the master of the budget model for the whole university, casting a long shadow over the annual budget review. In this section, I discuss four ways that deans align their college's priorities to the provost's interpretations of the university's priorities. I then explore the politics of sensemaking during the annual budget review.



### **Enacting Interdependence by Aligning Priorities**

During the annual budget review, the profiled deans want to demonstrate to the provost that their colleges are embracing and advancing the provost's broader agenda for the university. First, some deans leveraged the budget memo to demonstrate a commitment to the provost's academic agenda for the university. Dean Austen realized a need to demonstrate a commitment to the provost's academic vision for the university, including the provost's "strategic priorities" in the budget memo. In response, she underscored the college's activities for these two priorities, globalization and experiential learning, in the college's budget memo. Similarly, Dean Joyce has chosen to emphasize the college's international activities because the provost wants to expand the university's global footprint. In response, the provost encouraged the dean to ask for supplemental funds to advance the college's global activities, including offering more international internships for students. Dean Huxley also situates the college's priorities within the context of the provost's preferences. While drafting text to propose an international conference in the budget memo, the dean persuaded a faculty colleague to target countries that most interested the provost and the president. The dean has also used the budget memo to emphasize the college's outreach programs because he knows it is one of the provost's priorities. Dean Conrad underscores the provost's willingness to support academic initiatives that advance the university's reputation for innovation and research such as his college's multidisciplinary curriculum.

Second, some deans leveraged the budget memo to demonstrate a commitment to the provost's fiscal agenda for the university. Dean Joyce claims to understand the provost's fiscal agenda, tracking the provost's interpretation of the university's fiscal

environment and its implications for the university's budget. With this perspective, Dean Joyce wanted the budget memo to demonstrate his efforts to integrate the college's academic and financial planning, including the senior team's efforts to invest the college's surplus. Dean Stowe knew she could look like a good university citizen by investing the college's surplus into a signature academic initiative, the centers of excellence. The initiative not only reflected her academic vision for the college, but also demonstrated her commitment to the provost's fiscal agenda. Dean Stowe seriously doubts the significance of the annual budget review for her college, but acknowledges the political value in complying with the provost's call to spend down surpluses.

Third, some of the deans leveraged the budget memo to demonstrate a commitment to the provost's preferred logic for framing and describing academic priorities. Dean Austen conceptualizes the budget memo as a scientific article in hopes of appealing to the provost's analytical disposition. She knows that a budget memo packed full of data, especially quantitative data, about the college's progress will impress the provost. Similarly, Dean Joyce scrutinizes the college's financial data to ensure the accuracy of their reporting in the budget memo. The dean knows that the provost and other administrators in the provost's office will be impressed by clearly and correctly reporting financial data in the budget memo. Over time, Dean Huxley has learned – sometimes the hard way – the importance of adopting this approach. He gravitates to framing the college's vision as a narrative in the budget memo, but he has to come to realize that the provost cares more about the concrete – quantitative – evidence that demonstrates the college's progress over recent years.

Fourth, Dean Swift presents an alternative approach to these three forms of alignment during the annual budget review. Instead of underscoring how initiatives in his college advance the provost's priorities for the university, Dean Swift tries to shape the provost's future priorities by articulating the college's approach to vexing problems across campus. In one example, the dean wanted the budget memo to explain the college's efforts to address increasing diversity, which continues to be a problem across the university. In two different examples, increasing resources for mental health services and refining online education, the dean wanted the budget memo to describe the college's efforts to address burgeoning problems on campus. For Dean Swift, the annual budget review not only offers an opportunity to impress the provost, which might garner modest resources for initiatives, but also to influence the provost's agenda for the institution.

This impulse of the profiled deans to align their priorities with the provost's preferences during the annual budget review reveals the sensitivity of deans to resource dependence. Deans acknowledge that the provost's pool of discretionary funds has decreased in recent years – and will likely continue to do so in the coming years, as explained in Chapter 4. Within this context, the desire to align agendas is meant to impress the provost in hopes of securing increasingly scarce resources for their colleges. In some instances, this desire reflects the insecurity of deans over their college's fiscal health. Dean Conrad acknowledges the provost's financial support of previous academic priorities, including supporting the college's redesigned curriculum, which the college could not have afforded otherwise due to a deficit in the dean's office. Dean Austen has resurrected her college's balance sheet, but still needs the provost's office to fund special initiatives due to the college's lack of reserves. Dean Huxley describes an even more

acute sense of dependence on the provost's office. His college needs the provost's office not only for revenues from the Addendum, but also in the form of other supplemental funds because the college has few reserves after digging itself out of deficit. With this perspective, Dean Huxley privileges – even fixates on – the provost's priorities.

In contrast, deans who lead colleges in strong financial positions have concluded that the provost will oblige their requests for resources if they align the priorities of their college to the provost's priorities. Dean Joyce and Dean Stowe enjoy the luxury of leading colleges with substantial surpluses, but they still want to impress the provost by aligning priorities. These deans are not worried about securing resources to ensure survival of their college. Instead they want the provost to advance their signature priorities for their colleges. Dean Joyce anticipates needing additional dollars from the provost to launch the college's strategic initiatives; this expectation motivated his decision to embrace the provost's fiscal and academic agendas. Dean Stowe presides over a college with a surplus, but still realizes that she needs the provost's support for her plan to slowly spend down the surplus rather than liquidate the funds.

These findings clarify our understanding of subvention as a mechanism for promoting institutional objectives in decentralized, revenue-centered budget models. The prospect of garnering supplemental resources from the provost's office has enticed academic deans to align their academic and fiscal priorities with the provost's priorities. Deans who preside over colleges with strong financial positions and those who lead colleges with weak financial situations both frame the priorities of their colleges as advancing the university's broader priorities. Subvention enables provosts to establish some sense of common priorities across campus in decentralized budget models such as

expanding global offering, promoting experiential learning and increasing diversity. The deans enact a form of interdependence between their colleges and the provost's office by aligning the priorities of their colleges with the provost's priorities.

The effectiveness of subvention, however, depends on the degree of discretionary resources that the provost's office can distribute to academic deans for special initiatives. For subvention to work, provosts need to send a clear signal to deans – if you adopt my priorities for the university, then I will make it worth your while. But without these spoils, deans might not demonstrate similar degrees of enthusiasm, or even willingness, to advance the provost's priorities. Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) remind us that “power is exercised only when there is discretion in the allocation of resources... Discretion is missing when (a) there is no resource to allocate at all” (p. 464). This assertion presents a pessimistic projection for future provosts at Sprawling University who will likely possess fewer discretionary resources to allocate to deans for strategic initiatives.

### **Forging the Contours of Sensemaking During the Annual Budget Review**

The findings of this chapter also inform our understanding of the politics of sensemaking in decentralized budget environments. Politics endures with decentralized budget models, albeit in a different form than with incremental budget models. In their study of the University of Minnesota's implementation of a decentralized budget model, Hearn et al (2006) found “a decline in political wrangling” between provosts and deans as the institution transitioned from an incremental budget model to a revenue-centered budget model, but cautioned that politics did not “vanish” from the budget process (p. 311). In part, this new form of politics reflects shifts in budgetary authority; instead of

controlling specific budgetary inputs, the provost's office focuses on monitoring the academic and financial outcomes of colleges (Hearn et al, 2006).

This shift in authority, however, does not mark a decline in the provost's power. While provosts no longer control specific budgetary inputs, they now regulate numerous inputs that affect the sensemaking of academic deans during the budget review. Senior administrators such as provosts cannot claim a monopoly on meaning, but they are uniquely positioned to influence sensemaking across institutions. Weick et al (2005) reminds us that executives influence essential activities that affect sensemaking in organizations – distributing or regulating cues, governing lines of communication, defining the criteria for plausible stories, encouraging (and discouraging) certain interventions and legitimizing (or discounting) historical narratives.

At Sprawling University, the provost shapes the sensemaking of academic deans during the annual budget review by specifying the university's budgetary context in three critical ways. First, the provost serves as translator of the Board of Trustees' agenda for academic and fiscal affairs. The provost serves as the board's gatekeeper, reporting the expectations of trustees to deans. During the timing of my study, deans and their senior teams were making sense of two different expectations attributed to the Board of Trustees – bracing for the possibility of receiving a miniscule, if any, increase in tuition and charging deans to liquidate surpluses in their colleges. Not surprisingly, the profiled deans (and their finance directors) reported that the provost and other administrators in the provost's office emphasized these concerns throughout the budget review.

Second, the provost specifies the budgetary context by controlling the instructions for the annual budget memo. Most notably, the memo's instructions specify the provost's

strategic priorities for the university. The profiled deans quickly surmise the prudence of framing the activities of their colleges as advancing experiential learning, globalization and diversity, which were all referenced as priorities during the time of my study. While my findings reveal that the motivations of deans to attend to these signals assume different characters – ingratiation for some, supplication for others – the deans acknowledge the wisdom of aligning with the provost’s priorities rather than ignoring them. As master of the Campus Budget model, the provost claims the authority to adjust the parameters of the budget memo to privilege certain academic and fiscal concerns. In the budget review subsequent to my data collection, for example, the provost’s office altered the instructions for the budget memo to begin requiring deans to submit multi-year projections for their budgets and plans for space utilization in their colleges.

Third, the provost has enacted a preferred approach to fiscal stewardship that shapes the budgetary context for academic deans during the annual budget review. The provost's obvious preference for quantitative data, especially data that details academic and fiscal performance, affects how the profiled deans describe their academic priorities in the budget memo. Moreover, the provost has established a strong sense of transparency about fiscal issues with the deans, as described in Chapter 4. In the words of one dean, the provost’s transparency engenders confidence because the deans know the provost does not make “special deals.” The provost’s ability to enact these preferences demonstrates the provost’s power, despite not controlling specific budgetary inputs for the colleges. As the evaluator of colleges (and their academic deans) during the budget review affords, the provost influences how deans are expected to describe the academic and fiscal performance of their colleges.

By controlling these levers, the provost retains significant influence over the annual budget review at Sprawling University, but the profiled deans also demonstrate plenty of political canniness. As described above, some deans, including Dean Austen and Dean Joyce, have realized the benefits of aligning their college's priorities to the provost's academic and fiscal priorities for the university as well as attending to the provost's logic. Dean Joyce, for example, has aligned the college's academic and fiscal priorities to the provost's priorities; in response, the provost's office has pledged supplemental funds to the college in support of expanding global programs. In this respect, the profiled deans seem to be willing to embrace the provost's sensegiving in exchange for accruing some bundle of goodwill and supplemental funds.

Second, some deans exhibited only tempered support in complying with the provost's fiscal priorities. Dean Conrad's college has long reported a structural deficit, but the dean maintains that the provost continues to support his academic vision for the college, as evidenced by the provost's investments in the college's new curriculum. He suspects that as long as the college's deficit does not balloon, the provost will continue to support his academic priorities for the college because of his focus on academic excellence. Dean Stowe might be investing her college's surplus, but she plans to extend the timeframe for spending beyond the provost's guidelines. With insights from previous budget conferences, Dean Stowe gathers that the provost will not interfere with her plans to spend the college's surplus on the centers of excellence as long as the college maintains a positive fund balance. The provost has forged some shared sense of priorities with deans – probably a sufficient level of commitment to create “bonding commonality”



across the institution (Whalen, 1991) – but the commitment of some deans reflects political calculation more than belief in the virtue of the provost’s priorities.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explore the extent to which the university’s priorities, especially the provost’s interpretations of the university’s most critical priorities, affect how deans make sense of academic priorities during the annual budget review. My findings contribute to the literature in higher education in three important ways. First, I begin to close a curious gap in the literature by specifying the nature of interdependence between deans and provosts in decentralized budget models. By defining the parameters of budget call letters and articulating their personal preferences, provost’s can exert significant influence over how academic deans articulate academic priorities during annual budget reviews in decentralized budget models. This insight also clarifies our understanding of how senior executives affect politics with organizational sensemaking.

Second, and relatedly, in decentralized budget models, perceptions among academic deans of the provost’s capacity to fund special initiatives affects the magnitude of a provost’s influence. The effectiveness of subvention might be diminished if the provost’s office signals an absence – or alternatively, an abundance – of discretionary funds. As institutions adapt to new resource constraints, provosts would be wise to protect their access to these types of discretionary funds; without them, academic deans might embrace the provost’s interpretations of institutional priorities with less enthusiasm (if at all). This insight, along with coupling the budget lever of subvention with concepts

from resource dependence theory, deepens our understanding of the underlying dynamics between provosts and deans in decentralized budget models.

Third, my findings reveal that an underexplored purpose of annual budget reviews in decentralized budget models might be formalizing opportunities for sensemaking. In fact, this purpose might be more important than the espoused function of monitoring fiscal performance and providing accountability. Provosts and academic deans meet on numerous occasions to discuss the academic and fiscal performance of colleges, but the annual budget review creates a formal opportunity for deans to articulate their academic and fiscal priorities, including how their initiatives intersect broader institutional objectives. By specifying the institution's strategic priorities in the budget call letter, along with using the content of these documents to frame agendas for the budget hearing, provosts send clear signals to academic deans about the priorities that matter most to them and the institution. By creating opportunities over the year to monitor the fiscal positions of colleges such as quarterly meetings with deans and their finance directors, provosts can focus the attention of academic deans during annual budget reviews on the extent to which their colleges advance institutional objectives.

## **CHAPTER X**

### **Discussion**

### **Introduction**

In this final chapter, I first summarize my research findings. Second, I explore opportunities for future research on academic deans, decentralized budget models and sensemaking in organizations. Third, I examine several implications of my findings on practice in higher education.

### **Research Summary**

The organizing research question of my dissertation has been how do academic deans shape their college's academic priorities during university annual budget reviews. To investigate this central question, I explored several corresponding questions – the effect of academic and professional experiences on how deans make sense of academic priorities during the annual budget review, the effect of a college's context on how deans make sense of academic priorities during the annual budget review and how relationships with key stakeholders such as the provost and associate deans in their college affect how deans make sense of academic priorities during the annual budget review.

The first three chapters framed my investigation. In Chapter 1, I specify the fiscal and political challenges confronting public research universities in the United States, including prevalent calls for universities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of

their administrative operations and academic programs. Within this context, academic deans emerge as agents of action in universities due to their authority over academic and fiscal affairs in their colleges; the levers for reform reside in dean's offices across campuses more than anywhere elsewhere across campuses. In part, this increased prominence of deans reflects a transition of many universities to decentralized, revenue-centered budget models, which situate authority and responsibility for academic and budgetary affairs in colleges with deans rather in the provost's office with central administrators. I also introduce sensemaking as a conceptual framework for exploring how deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review, characterizing previous depictions of a dean's work in shaping priorities as epitomizing the nature of sensemaking in organizations.

In Chapter 2, I analyze four research literatures that are salient to my research question – the literatures from higher education on academic deans and decentralized budget models and the literature from organization theory on sensemaking and sensegiving. Despite the vital role of academic deans, only a modest literature explores their work. In particular, research in higher education has yet to examine how deans establish academic priorities while balancing academic-fiscal tradeoffs or navigating the budget reviews of their universities, despite scholars and former deans emphasizing the importance of this work. Despite its shortcomings, the literature on academic deans reveals that a critical objective of deans is to maintain, if not improve, academic quality while balancing the budget of their colleges – an observation that echoes the central themes of my dissertation. The literature on decentralized budget models in higher education illustrates that deans are conceived as the chief academic and budgetary

officers of their colleges in these models. I also investigate the literature on sensemaking from organization theory, reviewing its intellectual foundation and key properties. I then analyze the concept of sensegiving, reviewing its foundation and application in research on organizational change. I conclude by presenting a conceptual framework that explores the potential sensemaking of academic deans during university annual budget reviews.

In Chapter 3, I explore the methodological assumptions that disciplined my research. First, I frame my study in the interpretive paradigm, characterizing my research approach as “direct interpretive.” Second, I specify my research as a qualitative case study, explaining the selection of field site and recruitment of participants. For each participant, I pledged to provide as much anonymity as possible, which informed my writing, including naming each of the profiled deans after a famous novelist. Third, I not only describe my interview participants, but also explain my approach to designing the interview protocol and conducting interviews. Fourth, I describe my observational settings and my approach to conducting observations. Fifth, before ending this chapter with a discussion of validity, I articulate my approach to data analysis, which was disciplined by grounded theory. My analytical approach, which included five different phases, incorporated aspects of open and axial coding in hopes of maintaining the voice of my participants while also describing the behavior of deans in more abstract terms.

In Chapter 4, I present an institutional profile of my field site, Sprawling University, which is a pseudonym for a public research university in the United States. After describing the university’s governance structure, I explain the key components of the university’s decentralized budget model, which is called the Campus Budget, including the distribution of authority between the provost and academic deans. During

interviews, deans and senior administrators underscored not only the complexity of the budget model, but also the degree of autonomy afforded to deans relative to their counterparts at peer institutions. I describe the university's fiscal environment, which has deteriorated over the past two decades, and the university's response to increasing fiscal constraints, including implementing numerous phases of cost containment. Despite these efforts, senior central administrators, as well as deans and administrators in the colleges, anticipate continued fiscal constraints. This fiscal anxiety presents several salient consequences to my investigation. Most notably, the provost's office has diminishing capacity to fund special initiatives in colleges across campus. With fewer resources from the provost's office, deans will need to acquire or save resources to pursue their academic agendas in future years.

In Chapter 5, I introduce the six profiled deans of my dissertation – Dean Austen, Dean Conrad, Dean Huxley, Dean Joyce, Dean Stowe and Dean Swift. Before probing how these deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review at Sprawling University, I explore the academic and professional experiences that more broadly inform the conceptualization of their role in shaping academic priorities. I discovered that a rich tapestry of professional and personal factors – some expected, some unexpected – inform the sensemaking of deans. To a great extent, deans make sense of their role in shaping academic priorities by affirming their faculty identities. The deans espouse a commitment to collegial norms such as collaboration and consultation, including seeking input from faculty and senior administrators in their colleges, and adopt approaches that validate their own experiences as professors. Moreover, disciplinary background, which has been the focus of past research on the leadership orientations of deans, informs how some

deans conceive of their roles in shaping academic priorities, including the enactment of specific norms and technical skills that are associated with their disciplines.

The sensemaking of deans, however, entails more than affirming faculty identities, particularly disciplinary backgrounds. Dimensions of social identity and life experiences beyond academe, including spiritual beliefs, commitments to service and formative personal experiences, were found to inform how some deans envisioned their role in shaping academic priorities. In addition, the fiscal context of colleges affects how the deans conceptualize their roles in shaping academic priorities. The deans of colleges that are flush with reserves have resources to invest in their priorities and flexibility in deciding how and when to allocate these dollars. In contrast, the deans who inherited deficits were forced to rectify fiscal troubles at the expense of pursuing their own priorities. The fiscal context of colleges also affects the relationship between deans and the provost. The deans who lead colleges that report strong financial positions can engage the provost on their own terms, whereas those who inherit deficits are forced to secure the confidence and trust of the provost's office.

In Chapter 6, I turn my attention to exploring how the six profiled deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review at Sprawling University. In interviews and observations, authorship of the university's annual budget memorandum, which is the primary artifact of the annual budget review, emerged as the central mechanism by which deans shape academic priorities during the budget review. The deans adopted one of three approaches to authoring the budget memo – dominating, distributing or delegating. This finding sets the stage for subsequent chapters because different orientations to authorship engage individuals in colleges, particularly members

of senior teams, with varying levels of intensity. In authoring the budget memo, deans enact their budget authority during the budget review through several key activities: writing text for the budget memo, including articulating the most important goals in their colleges; analyzing and scrutinizing fiscal data for the memo; empowering finance directors to analyze financial data and even serve as project managers for compiling the memo; and marshaling the expertise and experience of members of their senior team, including asking associate deans and administrative directors to write portions of the budget memo, critique entire drafts and debate the memo's content as a team.

These findings reveal that some of the profiled deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review in a fashion that reflects their espoused approach to shaping priorities. Many of the profiled deans affirmed their faculty identities while authoring the budget memo. The deans who distribute authorship – Dean Austen, Dean Huxley, Dean Joyce and Dean Swift – demonstrate their espoused commitment to collaboration and consultation while shaping academic priorities. The disciplinary background of some deans informs their approach to authoring the budget memo, including validating norms such as cooperation and technical skills such as financial acumen. In contrast, the deans who dominate and delegate authorship, Dean Conrad and Dean Stowe, adopt approaches to authorship that contradict their espoused approaches to shaping academic priorities. While authoring the budget memo, they privilege other lessons learned as deans over their commitments to collaboration and consultation.

In Chapter 7, I explore an important way that some of the profiled deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review – leveraging authorship of the annual budget memo to establish a collective sense of academic priorities with their senior



teams. The deans who distribute authorship of the budget memo – Dean Austen, Dean Huxley, Dean Joyce and Dean Swift – establish some collective sense of academic priorities during the budget review in three key ways. First, deans leverage the process of authorship to generate and refine new ideas for academic priorities. For these deans and their senior teams, discussion of academic priorities during the budget review often constitutes a form of collective sensemaking. By glancing backwards toward the past and peering forward into the future, these deans, along with members of their senior team, collectively sketch priorities for their colleges. Second, deans leverage authorship to deepen commitments to academic priorities among members of their senior teams. By discussing and debating the college’s priorities while drafting and editing the budget memo, these deans and their senior teams engender a deeper commitment to these priorities. Third, some deans distribute authorship of the budget memo to celebrate the college’s accomplishments among the senior team.

In contrast, the two deans who did not distribute authorship of the budget memo – Dean Conrad and Dean Stowe – alienate members of their senior team by excluding them from the annual budget review. Despite espousing commitments to collaboration and consultation while shaping academic priorities in their colleges – promoting “open dialogue” for Dean Conrad and synthesizing “the truth” from multiple voices for Dean Stowe – these deans mostly ignore members of their senior team during the annual budget review. The consequences of exclusion extend beyond engendering frustration with the dean; administrators in these colleges express confusion over priorities in their colleges. These deans have created sensemaking gaps on their senior teams by

constricting the number of administrators who inform the memo and the academic priorities of their college.

In Chapter 8, I further explore the behaviors that the deans who distribute authorship of the budget memo. These deans aim to establish a collective sense of academic priorities on their senior teams, fostering an environment that stimulates collective sensemaking. These deans promote open dialogue with their senior teams, adopting specific discursive practices, in hopes of establishing a collective sense of academic priorities. In some cases, these practices were specific behaviors that deans enact during meetings with their senior colleagues – demonstrating restraint in revealing their own ideas during meetings with their senior teams, framing discussions by specifying the issues and problems that the team needed to explore rather than prescribing specific answers or remedies, inviting a diverse set of contributions across their teams and empowering debate and disagreement on their teams. In other cases, these practices were attitudes and expectations that deans establish with their teams in hopes of stimulating dialogue during meetings, including privileging the college’s best interests by tempering turf distinctions and assembling balanced senior teams that feature different tolerances for ambiguity and approaches for solving problems.

In Chapter 9, I explore an essential sensemaking exercise for academic deans during the annual budget review at Sprawling University – the extent to which the provost’s priorities for the university affect how the six profiled deans shape academic priorities. During the annual budget review, the profiled deans enact a sense of interdependence with the provost’s office by aligning the priorities of their colleges with the provost’s priorities for the university. The deans want to demonstrate to the provost

that their colleges are embracing and advancing the provost's broader agenda for the university. First, some deans use the budget review to demonstrate a commitment to the provost's academic agenda for the university. Second, some deans use the budget review to demonstrate a commitment to the provost's fiscal agenda for the university. Third, some of the deans use the budget review to demonstrate a commitment to the provost's personal preferences or preferred logics for describing academic and fiscal performance. Fourth, one of the deans adopts an alternative approach, leveraging the budget review to influence the provost's future priorities for the university. This dean aims to frame initiatives in the college as potential solutions to vexing problems across campus.

This alignment of priorities during the annual budget review reveals the sensitivity of academic deans to resource dependence. Deans recognize that the provost's pool of discretionary funds has decreased in recent years – and expect it to shrink further in the coming years. The prospect of garnering supplemental resources from the provost's office has enticed academic deans to align their academic and fiscal priorities with the provost's priorities. Deans who preside over colleges with strong and weak financial positions both frame the priorities of their colleges as advancing the university's broader priorities. These findings indicate that the concept of “subvention” enables provosts to establish some sense of common priorities in universities with decentralized budget models. These findings also advance our understanding of university politics with decentralized, revenue-centered budget models. Provosts can continue to wield considerable influence in shaping the meaning of priorities during annual budget reviews, even if deans serve as the chief academic and budgetary officers of their colleges, as long as they have supplemental resources to incentivize deans.

## **Implications for Research**

### *Shaping Academic Priorities as Dean*

My findings reveal clear opportunities to better understand how academic deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities and the factors that influence these conceptions. In Chapter 5, I began to explore this gap in the literature by analyzing how the profiled deans made sense of their role in shaping academic priorities. These findings provided a baseline understanding of how the profiled academic deans conceptualized their role in shaping academic priorities, which then set the stage for investigating how these deans shaped academic priorities during the annual budget review. While designing my dissertation, I expected that some notion of academic identity and experience as a faculty member would inform how deans conceptualized their role in shaping academic priorities due to past research on deans (Del Favero, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). Ultimately, I discovered that a diverse set of factors influenced their conceptualizations. A rich tapestry of personal and professional identities and experiences, along with the context of their colleges, affected how the profiled academic deans made sense of their role in shaping academic priorities.

While writing Chapter 5, I reflected on the shortcomings of existing research on academic deans, particularly studies that analyze the relationship between the espoused management styles of deans and their disciplinary backgrounds. First, Del Favero (2005, 2006a, 2006b) specified the work of deans by defining 28 leader-manager activities of deans from previous research on deans (Tucker & Bryan, 1991). She then created 112 stem statements for a survey by describing each of these leader-manager activities through the conceptual lens of Bolman and Deal's (2003) four organizational frames; her

survey included a bureaucratic, human resources, political and symbolic interpretation of each activity. By asking deans to describe their work through these 112 statements, Del Favero constructed a multi-frame index to determine the extent to which deans identified themselves as employing behaviors from each of Bolman and Deal's frames. She characterized deans who enacted behaviors from multiple frames as demonstrating "cognitive complexity."

A closer examination of these studies reveals a shortcoming – the dependent variable might not measure some of a dean's most important work. Del Favero reports the stem statements that had the highest factor loadings for each of the frames, but her list only includes approximately one third of the statements. In fact, the statements that were reported do not capture some of a dean's most critical responsibilities. There were few references to activities such as formulating and interpreting academic and fiscal priorities, managing and allocating financial resources, recruiting and hiring faculty, motivating faculty, monitoring the quality of academic programs, raising funds or collaborating with administrators in their colleges and across their universities. Some stem statements begin to probe these essential responsibilities of deans – "I credit faculty and administrators for helpful ideas and suggestions to let them know I know value participative decision-making" and "I initiate dialogue with chairs and staff about the importance of excellence to influence their buy-in to the importance of achieving excellence" – but most of them do not reflect essential activities that have been identified in past research on deans (Bray, 2008; Montez, Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002; Rosser, Johnsrud & Heck, 2003).

Second, as explained in Chapter 5, this previous research emphasized the effect of a dean's disciplinary background on a dean's orientation to leadership and management.

In addition to academic background, Del Favero (2006) explored years as a faculty member, years in previous leadership roles such as serving as an associate dean or a department chair and scholarly productivity relative to peers in their fields. These experiences might shape a dean's orientation to leadership and management – Del Favero found some evidence that scholarly productivity was a predictor of multi-frame behavior for deans who hailed from pure and high-consensus disciplines – but it might be more salient to explore what deans learned from these experiences rather than charting their productivity as scholars or years served as a department chair. Moreover, in Chapter 5, I found academic discipline and administrative and faculty experiences were only several factors that affect how deans make sense of their role in shaping academic priorities.

One opportunity for future research on academic deans, therefore, is to explore how deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities in more detail. This research could expand on my findings, exploring the professional and personal factors that shape how deans conceptualize their role in shaping academic priorities. Through open-ended, semi-structured interviews, scholars could explore how academic deans describe their role in shaping academic priorities and the factors that influence these conceptualizations. An example of an initial prompt, which is a variation of an interview question from my dissertation, could be “As dean, how would you describe your role in shaping the college's academic priorities?” An alternative prompt might be “how would you describe your role in advancing the academic mission of your college?” My findings indicate that the influence of four different stakeholders should be explored after ascertaining the dean's approach to shaping priorities – the provost, faculty, members of the dean's senior team (*e.g.*, associate deans) and department chairs. An example of a

prompt, for example, might be “How would you describe the provost’s role in shaping your college’s academic priorities?” or “How does the provost influence your approach to shaping academic priorities in your college?”

After posing these questions, subsequent questions could explore the factors that affect how deans conceptualize their approach to shaping academic priorities. One sequence of questions could examine the experiences of deans in academe – their academic and disciplinary training, experiences as pre- and post-tenure faculty, service experiences as faculty such as committee assignments, administrative experiences such as serving as department chairs and associate deans, their impressions of previous deans as (positive and negative) role models and any professional development that has informed their approach to leadership and management. Another sequence of questions could then explore the personal biographies and experiences of deans, including dimensions of their social identity, personal experiences over their lifetime and professional experiences outside of academe. A final sequence of questions could examine the context of their deanships, including the academic and fiscal strengths and weaknesses of their colleges, the broader context of their institutions and the legacy of their predecessors. This last set of questions could explore the extent to which deans were able to enact their vision of the deanship. This proposed research could inform how academic deans make sense of their role in shaping academic priorities and advancing the academic missions of their college.

Several design considerations could enrich this proposed research. First, scholars could interview deans at a single institution. This approach would resemble my dissertation, aiming to engage many of the deans at a single institution such as Sprawling University. Second, scholars could interview a larger sample of deans at different types

of institutions. In a multi-site case study, scholars could contrast the perspectives of deans at different types of institutions such as highest-research activity universities, moderate-research activity universities and larger-program master's colleges and universities to investigate whether variation in institutional context correspond with any differences in how deans conceptualize their roles in shaping academic priorities. Third, a different form of a multi-site case study could examine the perspectives of deans across different institutions of a similar type (*e.g.*, highest-research university) in a single discipline or across several disciplines in similar fields of study. While previous research (Del Favero, 2005a, 2006) implies that deans who hail from different disciplines might approach administrative work in different ways, my findings suggest that deans might apply collegial norms more than disciplinary-specific logics with administrative work. This proposed research could more explicitly investigate the potential effect of disciplinary background on the leadership and management orientation of academic deans.

### *Probing Accountability in Decentralized Budget Models*

My dissertation reveals numerous opportunities to investigate decentralized, revenue-centered budget models at universities in much more detail. In particular, the experiences of the profiled deans begin to illustrate some of the tensions that accompany accountability with decentralized, revenue-centered budget models. These experiences were central to the narratives of some deans: Dean Huxley realizing several years into his deanship that the college had accumulated a significant deficit, which stemmed from ballooned expenditures initiated by his predecessor that neither the college's former dean and finance director nor administrators in the provost's office had detected for several



years; Dean Stowe inheriting a sizable surplus because her predecessor had acquired funds from the provost's office over many years for programmatic enhancements that were stockpiled in the college's reserves and never invested into academic programs; Dean Conrad carrying a deficit in the dean's office over his decade as dean; and Dean Austen inheriting a massive budget deficit that neither her predecessor and the college's former finance director nor administrators in the provost's office had detected in time to stave off its expansion.

The experiences of these deans present a more complicated portrait of academic and financial planning at Sprawling University than described in Chapter 4. Senior central administrators at the university profess and have implemented policies of aggressive cost containment. Yet in some instances, administrators in the provost's office seem to muddle through enacting accountability with academic deans. The provost has championed a prudent vision of academic and financial planning at the university, which was illustrated in Chapter 4 and Chapter 9, but the provost's office also seems to tolerate (very costly) fiscal mishaps in colleges. Budget models such as the Campus Budget are designed to "unleash" deans, as explained in Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 6 and Chapter 9, but proponents of these frameworks assume that deans are capable of advancing the academic missions of their colleges while balancing their budgets.

Along with findings presented in earlier chapters, some of the profiled deans as well as other administrators in colleges expressed concerns about accountability with the Campus Budget model. Albeit outside of my central findings, I identified three sets of frustrations about accountability that begin to foreshadow future research on decentralized, revenue-centered budget models in higher education. First, some

administrators expressed frustration that the provost fails to hold deans accountable for addressing a problem that the provost's office had deemed a strategic priority for the annual budget review – increasing diversity. In fact, one of the profiled deans “challenged” the provost's commitment to increasing diversity during a budget conference. The budget memo features a specific section for deans to describe their efforts to increase diversity, but the issue has never been discussed during any of the dean's budget conferences. This dean confronted the provost, arguing, “I look at this and I say, ‘well, you don't intend to act on this; we were never engaged about this point. This must just be political comfort to write about this.’” In response, the provost stressed the university's commitment to diversity. This dean concluded that the provost and other administrators in the provost's office have “deluded” themselves into believing that increasing diversity is “so central,” even as they “do nothing about it.” They “pretend” that diversity really matters at Sprawling University. “What I took away from that [budget conference] is that [diversity] is central and vital to our perception of ourselves,” even if “we might not be living it.”

Administrators in another college expressed similar frustrations over the treatment of diversity during the annual budget review. An associate dean argued that the provost's office will not stimulate change across campus by asking “the same questions” in the budget memo every year. “If it's really important, you're going to ask questions about [diversity] and you're going to hold the dean's feet to the fire to get it right.” In sort, deans will only begin to prioritize diversity if the provost's office scrutinizes diversity initiatives as much as other content in the budget memo. “That's when you know it's important for the institution, when accountability is really important.” An administrative

director in the same college argued that the provost's office should ask more questions about diversity during the budget review because it "is the hottest issue on campus right now." The concern for these administrators is that the provost and administrators in the provost's office not only miss opportunities to increase diversity on campus, but also signal ambivalence about a problem that they have proclaimed as a strategic priority.

Second, some administrators in colleges with strong fiscal positions criticized the provost's office for the lack of substance during the budget conference. This observation echoed the frustrations of Dean Stowe and her finance director, which were presented in Chapter 9. Administrators in Dean Swift's college articulated similar frustrations. One associate dean argued, "We go through all this effort, collecting all this information. We put it down. We send it to them. Then they may ask you a few things about here and there." This administrator quipped, "I guess ... when the news is good, there was not much to talk about." An administrative director characterized the budget conference as a missed opportunity. "There were very few questions ... There was a little bit of discussion, but not what I think we could have had." Moreover, the college's finance director was surprised by the questions that were asked – and not asked – during the conference. The provost, for example, criticized the college's use of classroom space. The finance director anticipated this criticism, but was surprised that the provost or other administrators in the provost's office did not ask questions about the college's facilities projects, which total millions of dollars. This omission was "interesting" because of the provost's fixation with optimizing space. The frustration for administrators in this college is that the provost's office expresses ambivalence about the college's performance because the college reports a balanced budget.

Third, administrators in Dean Conrad's college expressed concerns over the provost's reluctance to pressure the dean to change policies that seem to undermine the college's budget. Despite preaching fiscal prudence, the provost does not scrutinize the college's budget during the budget review, according to an administrator in the college. The provost and other administrators in the provost's office, for example, "never really push" the dean to explain his plans for fixing the deficit in the dean's office. Another administrator explains, "all this time, there were no secrets ... We were very transparent about the problems in the college. [The provost] knew from day one what was going on, why things were happening." This administrator references numerous budget memos that report a tenuous fiscal situation and mention plans to reform policies such as guidelines for faculty grant buy-outs. "We've said 'we're going to change this' ... every year, we say 'we're going to change it, we're going to change it' ... and then nothing ever happens." The provost's failure to hold the dean accountable for implementing his own plan stumps this administrator. "I'm amazed. I'm amazed that [the provost is] not being more violent."

In fact, an associate dean perceives an "incredible reluctance" from the provost's office "to meddle" in the college's affairs. "The provost's office does not want to or like to get involved in college issues." This administrator suspects that the provost would "get involved" if the college was "really tanking" or "something really disastrous happens." Unfortunately, "internal dysfunction" is not sufficient reason to intervene. "They don't like to tell a college what to do. They might tell the college ... 'there's a problem, you need to fix it,' but they're not going to march in and give you this solution." Dean Conrad offers a similar assessment, describing the provost intervening in a college's affairs as

“the third rail.” “I don’t think you’ll ever hear the provost mandate to [deans] how to use their resources.” Instead the provost might recommend “options.”

Administrators in the college attribute the provost’s reluctance to several factors. First, administrators in the provost’s office are waiting for Dean Conrad’s term to end. One administrator in the college argues, “for the last couple of years, I think they knew that [the dean’s] term was about over, so that was not a time when they were going to do anything.” Second, the provost’s office emphasizes the college’s “bottom-line” balance. From this perspective, the college’s budget is “teetering,” but “we’re hanging in there,” according to one administrator. The college would be running a deficit without a substantial positive balance in one department, but this fact does not worry the provost’s office. “My bottom line is still positive, but I have had an operating deficit every year I have turned in a budget.” This administrator argues that the provost describes the college’s fiscal frustrations as “internal allocation” problems, which Dean Conrad could rectify by reclaiming resources from the departments and changing the college’s policy on grant buyouts.

Administrators in the college, however, contend that the provost misunderstands the situation – Dean Conrad has no intention of changing the guidelines for grant buyouts. In other colleges, when a professor funds a course release with a grant, the dean’s office captures some of these funds, while the faculty member receives a portion as a “modest bonus” and their department receives some of the funds. In Dean Conrad’s college, these funds are distributed to faculty members and their departments, but the dean’s office receives nothing. Through this practice, some professors receive substantial bonuses – upwards of \$20,000 (or more) every year. “The amount of bonuses that we’re

paying out is outrageous,” according to one associate dean. This practice exacerbates fiscal stress in the college; the finance director estimates that reallocating a portion of these buyouts could eliminate half of the deficit in the dean’s office. But those who stand the most to lose by changing this policy are the department chairs – and the dean does not want to alienate them. One administrator argues, “it’s amazing that we haven’t gotten into more trouble,” adding, “But the faculty salary thing. There’s the favorites.” Another administrator describes the buyouts as the “third rail,” which “nobody’s willing to touch.”

This extended vignette, which emerged as a central narrative in Dean Conrad’s college during interviews with administrators, illustrates a tension with accountability in decentralized, revenue-centered budget models – deans, not provosts, are responsible for the budgets in their colleges, regardless of whether deans bolster the fiscal health of their colleges. Dean Austen echoed concerns over the provost’s reticence to intervene when colleges are trending toward deficit. From her perspective, the provost’s office has increased its “scrutiny” of college budgets in the aftermath of the “very large debacle” and “catastrophic failure” in her college. The provost’s office now manages a “watchlist” of colleges that are in or approaching deficit; every month, central administrators meet with the dean and finance director of these colleges to review financial data.

The underlying concern for Dean Austen, however, is that the provost’s office does not offer “great rewards” for “real financial professionalism” or wield “great punishments” for financial incompetence. She criticizes the absence of consequences “for not understanding your own budget” as a dean. “If you don’t make the numbers ... there is not very harsh penalties.” At other universities, deans who accrued substantial deficits would lose their jobs, but “that doesn’t happen” at Sprawling University. “This is going

to be very controversial, but there are places where someone who created the kind of ... catastrophic financial mess ... that person would just be gone.” She appreciates the reasons for keeping fiscal meltdowns quiet, including not scaring donors and expending resources on national searches, but considers these reasons as “excuses.” For Dean Austen, the provost’s office is unlikely to curtail these mistakes, as long as the provost tolerates them.

Finance directors in colleges also articulated concerns about accountability, particularly the extent to which provosts monitor the fiscal decisions of deans. Some finance directors argued that accountability in decentralized budget models depends on a provost’s interest in interrogating deans. In Chapter 9, the finance director in Dean Stowe’s college argued that provosts invite inexact answers from deans by asking them unspecific questions during the budget review. This finance director further suggested that accountability in decentralized budget models depends on provosts quizzing deans about academic and financial planning in their colleges. During this administrator’s tenure, however, provosts have not always scrutinized the fiscal decisions of deans. This passivity makes deans “even less accountable” because “nobody is monitoring what’s really happening” in colleges. Without asking tough questions of deans, and even pushing them to verify their evidence, the provost and administrators in the provost’s office might not be able to differentiate between fact and fiction with deans.

While assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Campus Budget model, another finance director described an “astounding” absence of accountability. “The deans get to make decisions with no checks and balances, whatsoever.” This potential lack of accountability concerns – and frustrates – this administrator. “The decentralization of

Sprawling University truly is a double-edged sword ... you're a fool if you think anything different." This finance director referenced several examples of colleges accumulating deficits as evidence that the provost's office could strengthen its monitoring of deans. "There have been train wrecks here. Maybe not train wrecks, but derailments ... and guess who has to sweep it up? The Bank of the Provost." For this administrator, these incidents illustrate the need for provosts to ask "specific questions" during the budget review. Otherwise, deans will offer "formulaic" answers, surmising that they only need to disclose the information that they "have to answer" for the provost.

Concerns over fiscal accountability extend into the provost's office. In fact, some administrators in the provost's office articulate similar concerns. First, one administrator in the provost's office concedes that the annual budget conference was "more show than substance for many years." Second, this administrator acknowledges that the provost has needed to "clean up" fiscal "messes" in some colleges. "You get to the end of a dean's tenure, and the next dean coming in ... You'd have to spend multi-million dollars of bringing them back to a breakeven point, and clean up whatever carry-forward deficit there was. That just doesn't seem to make much sense." This administrator expressed frustration with this longstanding practice at the university, arguing that incoming deans should receive resources from the provost's office to advance their academic priorities rather than to cover inherited debts. "What you'd like to do when you're hiring a new dean is to be able to give them resources so that they can start working at their vision and move the organization forward." Instead the provost is too often informing incoming deans, "well, the only thing we're going to give you is we're going to start you off at a zero balance."



This administrator further explains that this practice often follows a provost's decision to not address fiscal problems in a college until the close of a dean's term. "That's *definitely* the case. In one case, there was a dean who was hired. At the end of the first year, my thought was 'we made a mistake, we should just admit the mistake and move on.'" This administrator was preparing to "carry" the dean on fiscal matters, including offering advice on balancing the college's budget, for several years until the provost recruited a new dean. Yet much to this administrator's shock, and disappointment, the former provost offered this dean another term. "I'm not in the position of provost, so I don't get to make those decisions," but "it was really painful." This administrator remains puzzled by this choice, explaining that the dean's college stagnated for years because the dean could not grasp academic and financial planning.

Third, another administrator in the provost's office echoed the assessment of some finance directors, arguing that a provost's most effective method for holding deans accountable was analyzing the budgets of colleges in detail and then asking specific questions of deans and their finance directors. "You meet with [the dean and the finance director] and you go through ... dig into the data and say, 'this is what I see happening – were you aware?' Sometimes they're not." Apart from demonstrating this form of vigilant curiosity, the provost's office has little influence over fiscal affairs in the colleges. "You're just there to provide guidance. We really don't have any ability to go in to a dean ... or a finance director and say, 'you can't do that.'"

In contrast to these perspectives, a senior central administrator argued that the provost's office holds deans "fully accountable" for their fiscal decisions. "I think the system is intended to catch problems before they happen." This senior administrator

stressed that deans are accountable for their budgets. “I've seen no instances in which that has not been satisfied.” Despite this confidence, this senior administrator acknowledges that the provost’s office continues to refine its processes for monitoring budgets in the college, including reviewing the budgets of each college every quarter and implementing its “watchlist” for colleges that are trending toward deficit. This administrator concedes that deans and their finance directors as well as administrators in the provost’s office still sometimes miss fiscal anomalies and discrepancies. “Does [the budget model] always work? No. We’re all humans, we all make mistakes.”

These insights from my interviews reveal numerous opportunities for research on investigating accountability with decentralized, revenue-centered budget models. This future research could assume numerous forms. First, it could be designed as a qualitative single- or multi-site case study that explores the issue of accountability with decentralized budget models from a variety of perspectives – the provost, administrators in the provost’s office, academic deans and college-level administrators such as finance directors and associate deans. As with my dissertation, data collection could include collecting institutional documents as well as conducting interviews and observations. In interviews, researchers could explore a range of issues – perspectives on the provost’s articulation of academic and fiscal priorities, the provost’s stewardship of the university’s budget model, the provost’s scrutiny of academic and fiscal planning in colleges, the efficacy of the university’s annual budget review, the efficacy of the university’s budget call letter, the efficacy of the university’s budget hearing, the extent to which deans leverage the budget review to strengthen commitments to academic and fiscal priorities in

their colleges and the extent to which deans leverage the budget review to strengthen their relationships with the provost.

Despite its potential contributions to the literature, scholars would likely encounter several challenges while conducting this research. First, the sensitivity of the topic might complicate efforts to recruit participants. The issue of fiscal accountability with budget models presents numerous sensitivities, particularly the prospect of revealing costly and embarrassing mistakes in the provost's office and dean's offices across campuses. It might be difficult to secure the participation of deans, which in turn would complicate efforts to secure the perspectives of associate deans and finance directors. I am reminded of a dean who declined to participate in my dissertation, arguing that he had more to lose than to gain by explaining his approach to the budget review. Moreover, it might prove even more difficult to secure the participation of provosts and administrators in provost's offices. I anticipate that recruiting participants to specifically discuss fiscal accountability could be an explicit trigger that would discourage central administrators from participating in a study, despite assurances of anonymity and confidentiality.

Second, even if researchers secured the participation of senior administrators such as provosts and deans, they might not necessarily capture rich data because respondents might not be willing to disclose their candid interpretations of vulnerabilities with the budget model at their university. With my dissertation, I was surprised that participants were willing to disclose their critiques of the annual budget review in vivid terms. My research questions, however, were not explicitly exploring fiscal accountability with the budget model. Instead respondents offered their impressions to explain their perspective about how deans shape academic priorities during the annual budget review. I suspect

shifting accountability from a background consideration to the foreground concern would complicate matters. It might be easier for senior central administrators, for example, to acknowledge that mistakes were made when the mistakes are not the central focus of the research. Moreover, I suspect that provosts and other administrators in the provost's office would deny opportunities to observe important meetings such as annual budget hearings, which was the fate of my inquiries to attend annual budget conferences between the provost and deans at Sprawling University.

Although a case study could inform our understanding of accountability with decentralized budget models, it might never come to fruition due to the sensitivity of the topic. In contrast to this approach, an anonymous survey – or more likely, a series of anonymous surveys – might offer a more promising research design for exploring accountability with decentralized budget models. This design might not offer the prospect of collecting vivid data from interviews and observations, but it could be feasible because respondents might feel safer to report their candid impressions in an anonymous survey. The target sample would be academic deans at research universities, including those with the Carnegie classification of highest-research activity, higher-research activity and moderate-research activity. In fact, by recruiting deans across a broad set of research universities, researchers could collect data from deans who work within different budget frameworks, including decentralized, revenue-centered models and centralized, incremental models.

The questionnaire, which could ask academic deans to specify their level of agreement for a series of statements on a Likert seven-point scale, could explore the same themes mentioned earlier with a qualitative case study. Potential questions are presented

in Appendix A. First, one set of questions could explore the provost's articulation of academic and fiscal priorities as the chief academic officers and chief budgetary officers of universities. Example prompts could include "My provost articulates a clear academic vision for the university" and "My provost consults with deans before making significant fiscal decisions." A second set of questions could explore the provost's role as the steward of budget models. Example prompts could include "My provost is an expert on the university's budget model" and "Budget administrators in the provost's office are experts on the university's budget model." A third set of questions could explore the provost's role in scrutinizing academic and financial planning in colleges. Example prompts could include "My provost understands my college's academic priorities" and "My provost asks penetrating questions about my college's current budget situation."

A fourth set of questions could explore the efficacy of annual budget reviews at universities with decentralized budget models. Example prompts could include "The budget review explores the most important fiscal issues in my college" and "The budget review has real consequences for my college's budget." A fifth set of questions could investigate impressions of the university's budget call letter. Example prompts could include "The university's budget call letter clearly signals the provost's fiscal priorities" and "The university's budget call letter asks deans to respond to the right set of strategic questions." A sixth set of questions could explore assessments of the university's budget hearing. Example prompts could include "The budget hearing should include more scrutiny of my college's academic plans" and "The budget hearing focuses too much on academic issues that do not really matter."

A seventh set of questions could explore how academic deans leverage the annual budget review in their colleges. Example prompts could include “I use the university’s budget review as an opportunity to discuss my college’s academic priorities with my colleagues on the senior team” and “I use the university’s budget review as an opportunity to increase commitment to our academic priorities among my colleagues on the senior team.” An eighth set of questions could explore how academic deans leverage the annual budget review with the provost. Example prompts could include “During the university’s budget review, I frame my college’s academic priorities as advancing the provost’s academic priorities for the institution” and “During the university’s budget review, I am rewarded with finance resources for aligning the college’s priorities to the provost’s priorities for the university.”

In addition, other individual and institutional characteristics could enrich the analysis. First, as mentioned earlier, it would be essential to differentiate institutions by their form of budget model. Second, a series of institutional variables, including sector and Carnegie classification, could contrast responses across different types of institutions. Third, a series of background characteristics about deans could enrich this analysis. These variables could include a dean’s disciplinary background, the number of years a dean has served as dean at that university, whether a dean had served as a dean elsewhere and whether a dean was at the institution prior to becoming dean. Fourth, a series of characteristics about a dean’s college could enrich this analysis. These variables could include the discipline or field of study, some measure of the college’s total revenues, some measure of the college’s revenue composition (*e.g.*, percentage of revenues from tuition and research grants) and some measure of the college’s fiscal health. Fifth, the

analysis would benefit from collecting data on the institution's provost, including the provost's disciplinary background, the provost's administrative experience and the tenure of the provost. Researchers could collect this data by asking respondents and accessing information on institutional web sites.

In addition to these variables, the survey could pose a series of open-ended questions of academic deans. First, deans could be asked, "To what extent do you feel that the provost holds you accountable for fiscal planning in your college?" and "To what extent do you feel that the provost holds you accountable for academic planning in your college?" Second, deans could be asked, "To what extent do you believe the provost's office would be able to help you identify a potential budget crisis?" Third, deans could be asked, "To what extent has the provost identified the most important fiscal priorities for the university?" and "To what extent has the provost identified the most important academic priorities for the university?" Fourth, deans could be asked, "To what extent are you confident in your ability to manage your college's budget?" and "To what extent are you confident in the provost's ability to help you manage your college's budget?" Along with the previous questions, these open-ended questions could generate extensive data from deans on their perceptions of accountability in decentralized budget models.

### *Stimulating Dialogue on Senior Administrative Teams*

A recurrent theme throughout Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 was that scholars in higher education have not investigated how academic deans engage their senior administrative teams, despite former deans emphasizing the importance of consulting and collaborating with their teams. In fact, scholars rarely mention senior teams, let alone examine how

deans engage them. My findings suggest several opportunities for future research that would explore how academic deans consult and collaborate with their senior teams.

First, scholars could design a qualitative study to explore how deans engage their senior teams. This project could apply a research design that was similar to my dissertation – interview deans to explore their approach to engaging their senior teams, interview members of senior teams to understand their experience on the team, including how they perceive their dean’s approach to engaging the senior team, and observe senior administrative teams in action. This project could be organized as a single- or multi-site case study. One approach could be to target deans who represent different disciplinary orientations such as pure-hard (*e.g.*, colleges of natural sciences), pure-soft (*e.g.*, colleges of social science, colleges of music), applied-hard (*e.g.*, colleges of engineering, colleges of medicine) and applied-soft (*e.g.*, colleges of business, colleges of education) across several institutions. By varying field of study, scholars could not only compare the issues explored across different senior teams in different types of colleges across several universities, but also explore the extent to which differences in disciplinary context affect how deans engage their senior teams. Another approach could be to contrast responses across different types of institutions, including those with different budget models or different Carnegie classifications, to investigate whether differences in institutional context correspond with any differences in how deans engage their senior teams or in terms of issues and problems that they explore as a team.

The introductory interviews with deans could explore several key themes. First, a set of background questions could confirm basic details about the college’s senior team – the composition of the senior team, the frequency of meetings and the duration of



meetings. A second set of questions could explore how academic deans conceptualize the mission and purpose of their senior teams. Example prompts might include “How would you describe the purpose of the senior team?” and “What type of issues do you explore with the senior team?” Third, another set of questions could ask how deans frame discussion of issues and problems with their senior teams. Example prompts might include “To what extent do you frame issues when introducing discussion during meetings of the senior team?” and “To what extent do you reveal your own opinion of issues when framing discussions of the senior team?”

The sequencing of interviews and observations would be important with this project. It would be helpful to understand the dean’s overall approach to leading the senior team before conducting observations because this background information would help to focus the observations of the dean’s framing of issues. The answers to these questions would provide essential context for observing meetings of the senior team, particularly in understanding the intent of deans in introducing and framing discussion. After conducting at least several observations, scholars could then interview members of the senior team. It would be helpful to complete at least some of the observations before interviewing members of the senior team because this observational data could inform specific follow-up questions with members of the senior team about the espoused approach of deans and their actual behavior in meetings of the senior team. A dean might claim to stimulate dialogue, but this claim does not mean that they actually do it.

After conducting observations and interviewing members of the senior team, a second interview with academic deans could examine their approach to meetings in more detail. One set of questions could explore the extent to which deans foster an

environment that encourages open dialogue. Example prompts might include “During meetings of the senior team, to what extent do you call on your colleagues to capture a diversity of perspectives?” and “During meetings of the senior team, to what extent do you encourage the debate of problems?” Another set of questions could explore the extent to which deans try to establish a collective sense of meaning during meetings of the senior team. Example prompts might include “To what extent do you try to summarize everyone’s emergent impressions during discussions with the senior team?” and “To what extent is it important to have everyone agree with each other’s interpretations of problems coming out of meetings of the senior team?”

This type of research design could generate rich insights, but scholars would likely encounter challenges with securing participants. First, while deans might agree to discuss their own approach to engaging their senior teams, some might be less willing to invite researchers to discuss their approach with members of their senior team. Moreover, some deans might be unwilling to invite researchers into meetings of the senior team. In my dissertation research, some deans were reluctant to invite a researcher from outside their college to meetings that many faculty in the college are rarely invited to attend. Second, in other cases, deans might be unwilling to (potentially) compromise the senior team as a sheltered forum by inviting anyone from outside the team to meetings, especially someone who is scrutinizing the team’s behavior and taking copious notes. With my research, some deans believed that inviting any outsider could undermine the delicate sense of candor and trust that they had established on the senior team.

Alternatively, this research could be designed as a survey that explores how academic deans engage their senior teams. This design might not generate the same

richness of data as a qualitative study, but it could reach a larger sample of academic deans. The sample, for example, could target academic deans at a variety of institutions. The questionnaire, which could ask respondents to specify their level of agreement for a series of statements on a seven-point scale, could explore similar themes to those mentioned earlier with a qualitative case study. Appendix B features a full set of potential questions.

First, one set of questions could explore how academic deans conceptualize the specification of issues and problems in advance of meetings of the senior team. Example prompts could include “I come to meetings of the senior team with a clear idea of the best solution to the problems confronting the college” and “I come to meetings of the senior team with specific questions to ask my colleagues in hopes of better understanding the problems confronting the college.” Second, another set of questions could explore how academic deans frame issues and problems during meetings of the senior team. Example prompts could include “During meetings of the senior team, I articulate my own interpretation of problems to introduce discussion” and “During meetings of the senior team, I disclose my own preferred solution of problems as an introduction to problems.”

Third, another set of questions could explore how academic deans encourage dialogue during meetings of the senior team. Example prompts could include “During meetings of the senior team, I encourage my colleagues to articulate different perspectives to those that have already been articulated by other colleagues” and “During meetings of the senior team, I encourage my colleagues to be willing to disagree with me.” Fourth, another set of questions could explore how academic deans construct a collective sense of meaning with issues and problems during meetings of the senior team.

Example prompts could include “During meetings of the senior team, I summarize everyone’s emerging perspective on problems throughout conversation” and “During meetings of the senior team, I want everyone to accept a shared interpretation of problems confronting the college.”

Along with these questions, other individual and institutional data could be collected to enrich analysis of how academic deans engage their senior teams. First, a series of background characteristics about deans could enrich this analysis. These variables could include a dean’s disciplinary background, the number of years served as dean at that university, whether a dean had served as dean at different institutions and whether a dean was in the college prior to becoming dean. Second, a series of characteristics about the colleges of the deans could enrich this analysis. These variables could include the discipline or field of study, the size of the senior team, the composition of the senior team and the frequency of meetings. Third, a series of institutional variables could allow researchers to contrast responses across different types of institutions, including those with different budget models and different Carnegie classifications (*e.g.*, highest-research activity versus moderate-research activity), to investigate whether differences in institutional context correspond with any differences in how deans engage their senior teams.

### *Probing Managerial Sensemaking in Meetings*

My dissertation reveals opportunities to further investigate the sensemaking of senior managers such as academic deans in meetings. In Chapter 6, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, I describe meetings of senior teams as a critical forum for deans and their

senior teams to sound out their hunches and assemble disparate cues into more coherent interpretations of issues and problems. With the lessons of my dissertation, I believe that the research context of annual budget reviews at universities offers other opportunities to advance research on managerial sensemaking during meetings, including the influence of senior administrative teams on the sensemaking of managers.

First, scholars could further ascertain the extent to which senior managers such as academic deans depend on their senior teams to help them make sense of priorities. The research imperative would be probing the perspective of deans prior to meetings with their senior teams during the annual budget review – their preference of what issues to feature in budget documents, their perceptions of what perspectives they need to explore with their teams and their plans for disclosing their impressions of issues during meetings. In sensemaking terms, this interview would begin to establish a dean’s notion of plausibility before meeting with their senior teams as well as specify the rationale for the nascent interpretations of deans. The interview would explore the observations (or cues) that deans consider most relevant to understanding an issue and the meaning of past experiences with this issue. In addition, this interview would more explicitly probe the extent to which impressions of deans reflect notions of their identity and biography.

Before observing deans in meetings with their senior teams, it would be helpful, if not necessary, to understand the extent to which deans have already formed impressions of preferred content for budget documents. In hindsight, I could have modified my research design to push even harder to interview deans not only in advance of team meetings, but also after their meetings to compare their expectations for meetings with insights gleaned from the team’s discussion. With my dissertation, the schedules of deans

did not allow this sequencing of interviews-observations-interviews; despite potential logistical challenges, this level of research access could be negotiated in advance of collecting data. Moreover, these interviews would provide a baseline understanding that would help focus data collection during observations of team meetings.

Second, I would explore in greater detail the reactions of deans after meetings with their senior teams during the annual budget review. Whether it was immediately after the meeting, later that day or the following day, this interview with deans would aim to capture deans in the process of making sense of their team's discussion. This second interview would compare a dean's expectations for the meeting with the actual discussion during the meeting. Is a dean, for example, more or less certain of their impression of what should be featured in the budget document after meeting with the senior team? Or, how did the team's discussion clarify the dean's understanding of an issue or problem? What specific insights from their colleagues helped to enrich their understanding of an issue or problem and what was so significant about those perspectives? To what extent did the discussion of the senior team affect the dean's impressions of the college's priorities and their notions of how to develop, refine and advance these priorities? This second interview would not only reveal what deans were contemplating during meetings – or as close to capturing this perspective as possible – but also reveal how discussion with their teams affected their interpretation of priorities and their consideration of future action such as proposed descriptions of priorities in budget documents.

Another opportunity to deepen our understanding of managerial sensemaking in meetings would be investigating annual budget hearings between academic deans and provosts. Within the context of Sprawling University, this research would entail

investigating the annual budget conference. As illustrated in Chapter 9, a critical sensemaking activity of deans during the annual budget review is making sense of the provost's academic and fiscal priorities for the institution. Interviews with deans, along with members of their senior team who attend the budget conference and administrators in the provost's office, provides sufficient data to substantiate that deans align the priorities of their colleges with the provost's priorities for the university.

Observations of annual budget conferences, however, would enrich our understanding of how academic deans make sense of aligning the priorities of their colleges with those of the provost in several important ways. First, the actual dialogue of deans might reveal their approaches to sensegiving in the moment. To what extent (or how) do deans, for example, use language to further frame the activities of their colleges as advancing the institution's priorities beyond referencing text in their annual budget memos? To what extent do deans immediately frame discussion of their priorities in the provost's priorities for the university? During the meeting, to what extent (or in what ways) do deans deliberately appeal to the provost's priorities as representing the "right" set of priorities for the institution?

Second, observation of this dialogue during the budget hearing would begin to reveal the provost's perspective. During my interviews with current and former senior administrators in the provost's office, I learned that asking them to discuss their experiences with different deans during budget conferences was a difficult task. During the annual budget review, the provost meets with every dean about the budget of their college, along with numerous other administrators who manage non-academic units. It is difficult for provosts to differentiate one budget conference from another; each dean only

has one budget conference with the provost, but the provost might have more than 50 different budget conferences with deans and other administrators at large universities such as Sprawling University. One senior administrator declined to “generalize” the types of questions that are asked during budget conferences. “I think the [conferences] are going to be very different ... there’s not two meetings that are the same.” Despite sensing some wiliness in this senior central administrator’s response, I acknowledge the difficulty of answering this question. Moreover, due to confidentiality considerations, I could not prompt senior administrators to discuss the profiled deans; senior central administrators were not about to disclose details from these sensitive conversations. The best opportunity to capture the provost’s perspective during the budget review, therefore, is probably to observe them in action.

This proposed research would not only advance the literature on academic deans, but also contribute to the literature on sensemaking in organizations. First, scholars would collect more specific and timely data to further ascertain the sensemaking of managers in the moment. This data might clarify the extent to which different different managers privilege different properties of sensemaking. Despite offering a conceptual model of individual sensemaking in organizations (Weick et al, 2005), Weick (1995) has also acknowledged that there might be variation in the interplay among the sensemaking properties. My findings indicate that senior managers who inhabit complex and ambiguous positions, which feature minimal formal training and mentoring, look inwards and glance backwards to conceptualize how to perform their work. As senior managers grapple with making sense of uncertain issues and problems, do they privilege affirming their identity or validating past experiences while ascertaining the meaning cues? During



the annual budget review, for example, does discussion of academic priorities tend to trigger reflections of past experiences as administrators or faculty members more (or less) than notions of their professional or personal identities?

In addition, this research could explore the extent to which deans believe that different types of media trigger their sensemaking in different ways. To what extent do deans, for example, notice different degrees of stimulation with their sensemaking when engaging solitary experiences such as drafting budget documents and group activities such as debating drafts of budget documents with their senior teams? As explored in Chapter 8, discussion in meetings often provides the type of rich media that stimulates sensemaking among individuals and as a group. By more closely bracketing interviews and observations with academic deans, scholars could investigate the different ways that different forms of media stimulate the sensemaking of senior managers.

### **Implications for Practice**

#### *Recruiting and Selecting Deans*

My findings could inform the recruitment and selection of deans in two important ways. First, the biographies of the profiled academic deans reveal potential benefits for institutions to not impose uniform policies on searches for deans. My findings illustrate that a college's context can cast a long shadow over the selection of deans, which echoes earlier research on deans (Twombly, 1992). The selection of Dean Joyce offers an illustration. He was serving as an associate dean in the college, partnering with the dean to implement a new academic and fiscal vision. After the previous dean was plucked for another position, Dean Joyce did not even know that he was a candidate for the deanship.

Instead the outgoing dean chose to meet with the college's senior faculty to ascertain their support for nominating him as the next dean; and with the senior faculty's blessing, the outgoing dean recommended his selection to the provost; and the provost agreed to the appointment after meeting with the faculty. The outgoing dean, senior faculty and provost all agreed that the college was headed on the right path with the right vision – and Dean Joyce was the right leader to continue developing and executing this vision.

The recruitment of Dean Austen offers an alternative example, demonstrating the benefit of targeted searches. The most salient feature of the college, its massive budget deficit, dictated the parameters of the search process. Dean Austen was selected after a targeted search because of her past experience as a dean; she had proven financial and management skills. The process of the targeted search afforded Dean Austen – behind closed doors – an opportunity to learn about the Campus Budget model to understand how she could address the college's deficit. Through this experience, she earned the trust of the provost and other administrators in the provost's office, which ultimately helped her efforts to resurrect the college's fiscal situation. These two examples demonstrate the importance of adopting a flexible policy for recruiting and selecting deans that meets the specific needs of a college at a specific point in time. In both cases, the provost made the final hiring decision, but the contours of each search reflected the different circumstances of the different colleges. In contrast, a more stringent policy that required national searches for all open deanships might not have served the short- or long-term interest of either of these colleges.

Second, provosts and search committees in colleges should consider the extent to which the selection process stimulates the personal reflection and sensemaking of

prospective deans. The search process not only offers colleges an opportunity to learn about the candidates, but also provides candidates an opportunity to learn about the college – and about themselves. Dean Swift’s experience during the selection process illustrates this lesson. Dean Swift (and other colleagues) believed he was qualified to be dean, and even thought he could be an effective dean, but he had yet to commit to wanting and pursuing the position in earnest. During the search process, however, he became more convinced that he wanted to become the college’s dean.

In retrospect, Dean Swift believes two activities stimulated his commitment to pursuing the deanship with gusto. First, the day-long campus interview featured a public, community presentation in which the candidates had to articulate their proposed visions for the college. Second, to prepare for this presentation, Dean Swift wrote himself a letter to outline the rationale for his candidacy and his vision for the college. These two activities prompted the dean not only to look backward – framing his past experiences inside and outside of the college as salient to the work of leading the college as dean – but also to gaze forward – relating this past experience to a future vision for the college. To prepare for this presentation, Dean Swift had to construct an image of the college that was situated in the past, present and future.

Dean Swift believes that any search process was bound to solidify his vision for the college, particularly how his vision suited the college’s present and future needs. But in retrospect, he realizes that the prominence of the community presentation as a milestone of the interview process stimulated his reflection about his motivations for pursuing the deanship and his vision for the college. This lesson could be instructive to provosts and chairs of search committees. The search process for academic deans not

only facilitates the selection of new deans (most of the time), but also constitutes the initial orientation of new deans to their colleges in many cases. The milestones of the search process can encourage more (or less) preparation and inspire more (or less) commitment from the candidates. The consequences of these differences might affect the quality of the search process and the degree of preparedness of incoming deans.

### *Orienting Deans to Budget Models*

My findings underscore the potential benefit of designing a budget orientation program for incoming deans, particularly at institutions with decentralized, revenue-centered budget models. In these models, deans serve as the chief academic and budgetary officers for their colleges. Yet academic deans rarely enter their roles with formal training in finance or any form of management and leadership. In the blunt assessment of one finance director, academic deans are not promoted “because of their administrative prowess,” which means that they might be “very successful” as researchers, but “they get into an administrative role and they suck at it.” The promise and peril of these models rests on the ability of deans to understand and leverage the budgetary levers at their disposal. The price of being wrong – selecting a dean who does not understand the university’s budget model or the college’s budget – is too high to not provide incoming deans an extensive orientation program. I suspect that Dean Austen and Dean Huxley would echo this assertion.

Provosts would be prudent to require this program of all incoming deans, including those who have served as associate deans or department chairs in their colleges or as deans at other institutions. Incoming deans who have served as college-level

administrators at the university might understand some components of the budget model, including the annual budget review, but probably do not appreciate or understand its complexity. Dean Joyce and Dean Swift referenced understanding the decentralized nature of Sprawling University, but also acknowledged their ignorance of the budget model before their appointments. Deans with previous experience at other institutions might understand general features of budget models, but universities tend to customize their budget models to accommodate unique aspects of their institutional culture and history. Dean Austen, Dean Conrad and Dean Huxley were all surprised by the complexities and idiosyncrasies of the Campus Budget model, despite their previous experience as deans at other public and private research universities. Dean Conrad, for example, conceded that it took him at least six years to understand how to leverage the budget model, despite serving as a department chair at Sprawling University before becoming a dean at a peer institution.

My findings indicate that a useful budget orientation would include several phases. The first phase of a budget orientation could be the provost meeting individually with new deans. In reality, this conversation might continue and deepen discussions that started during the search process. The provost's primary objectives for this discussion should be articulating the institution's academic and fiscal priorities as well as their own philosophy for academic and fiscal planning. This candid conversation might explore the following questions: What is the provost's assessment of the college's budget? What fiscal decisions are most important for the dean to address in the short-term (*i.e.*, the next year) and the medium-term (*i.e.*, the next three years)? What is the provost's assessment of the dean's predecessor as an academic and budget manager? What economic and

political pressures are shaping the university's budget context, including the expectations of key stakeholders such as the board of trustees? What academic initiatives are the provost inclined to support with discretionary funds? To what extent does the provost envision the dean needing to conduct some form of strategic planning? What is the president's role with the university's budget? A discussion of these questions would not only reveal the provost's expectations for academic and budget planning, but also begin to establish a common reference point for future discussions about the college's and the university's academic and financial priorities.

The second phase of this orientation should be a meeting among the provost, other senior budget administrators in the provost's office and each incoming dean. This briefing from administrators in the provost's office should explore similar issues as the one-on-one conversation between the provost and dean, but delve into more specific details about the college's budget, including key inputs such as enrollment, faculty lines and staff headcount, subsidies from the provost's office and endowment income. This meeting should also orient each dean to key milestones during the university's annual budget review. In the context of Sprawling University, for example, administrators in the provost's office would be wise to orient new deans to the annual budget memorandum and the annual budget conference. An important, yet sensitive aspect of this discussion would be the provost's office's assessment of the previous dean and the college's finance director. This perspective runs the risk of anchoring the incoming dean's impression of the college's finance director in the provost's assessment, but this perspective would help the dean determine the extent to which the finance director possesses sufficient expertise to help advance the dean's academic priorities.

The final phase of this orientation could engage the provost and administrators from the provost's office as well as each new dean and their senior staff. Attendees from each college, for example, could include the dean and administrators in the college who help them shape academic and fiscal priorities, including the finance director, associate deans, assistant deans and administrative directors, depending on the size and structure of the college. The content of this meeting could assume numerous forms, depending on the college's fiscal situation, but it should explore at least two key issues. First, the provost should articulate the university's academic and fiscal priorities. Second, administrators in the provost's office should provide their interpretation of the college's current fiscal situation and academic initiatives. Administrators in the provost's office, for example, could reference and summarize data from past institutional documents such as annual budget memorandums.

This meeting would serve several purposes. First, the discussion would detail the provost's interpretation of the university's priorities, which would provide deans and their senior teams a common reference point from which to explore the extent to which the college is advancing (or could be advancing) the university's priorities. Second, the discussion would provide the provost's analysis of the college's academic and fiscal priorities for a dean and their senior teams, which would reveal any concerns that should be clarified with the provost in the moment or during a subsequent meeting between the dean and the provost. Third, the discussion would begin to socialize deans into consulting their senior teams while exploring academic and fiscal priorities. In fact, provosts could encourage this collaboration throughout the meeting, referencing deans who engage members of their senior teams during the annual budget review at their university.

### *Conducting Self-Studies of Senior Teams*

A recurrent theme throughout my findings is that senior administrators such as academic deans should develop and nurture senior teams that help them make sense of the complex issues and problems confronting their colleges. An important insight from Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 is that academic administrators should consider opportunities to enrich meetings of their senior teams by promoting open dialogue and stimulating collective sensemaking. To this effect, my findings in Chapter 8 featured a set of activities that administrators could adopt to stimulate open dialogue on their senior teams.

Academic deans could promote this practice by conducting a self-study of their senior teams. An incoming dean might find this exercise helpful because they might be a first-time dean and might be new to their college. An incoming dean might not know members of the senior team beyond interactions during the search process; and they might only know some members of the senior team. The initial composition of the senior team might include a mix of administrators who the dean has appointed to specific positions and those who the dean inherited from the previous dean. By conducting a self-study, an incoming dean can become more familiar with the contributions and preferences of individual members of the senior team as well learn more about group dynamics across the entire team. In some cases, experienced deans might also realize the benefits of conducting a self-study of their senior teams. An experienced dean could use a self-study as an opportunity to reboot the college's senior team after a period of significant turnover on the team. Alternatively, an experienced dean could conduct a self-study to mark a fresh start with their senior team after being appointed to a new term.



The recommendation to conduct self-studies of senior administrative teams has been suggested in previous research in higher education. In their study of college and university presidents, Bensimon and Neumann (1993) advised presidents to conduct self-studies, specifically suggesting that presidents collect data on three themes – how the president perceives their role on the team, how team members perceive the president’s effect on the team and how team members evaluate the team’s performance. While presidents could collect this data by conducting anonymous surveys or assigning a common reading from which to discuss the team’s performance, Bensimon and Neumann (1993) favored using an external consultant because this individual could bring an unbiased perspective to interviews and observations. By entrusting data collection to a third party, members of the team might be more willing to offer their candid assessments of the president, their colleagues and the team’s strengths and weaknesses.

This advice informs my own recommendation for academic deans to conduct self-studies of their senior teams. First, deans should use an external consultant (such as a professor from a college of education) to collect data from members of their senior teams about the previous dean’s approach to leading the team and the team’s group dynamics, as referenced in Appendix C. These questions would investigate the history of the senior team, probing how the dean’s predecessor engaged the team. Questions could include “How would you describe the previous dean’s role on the senior team?” and “To what extent did the previous dean consult and collaborate with the senior team to formulate the college’s academic priorities?” Other questions would probe the team’s group dynamics, including “To what extent did the previous dean encourage the articulation of a diverse set of perspectives during meetings of the senior team?” and “During team meetings, to

what extent did you feel comfortable debating issues as a team under the previous dean?”

The answers to these questions would help an incoming dean begin to understand the rhythms of the senior team that existed under the previous dean. An incoming dean would be wise to understand these patterns before articulating and espousing their own set of expectations for the senior team.

After a consultant collects this data from members of the senior team, incoming deans should schedule a meeting of the senior team to discuss the aggregate results. This discussion would serve several purposes. First, the discussion would afford an incoming dean the opportunity to observe the team’s reaction to their collective assessment of the team’s dynamics under the previous dean, which would demonstrate how the senior team explores issues and problems as a team. Second, this presentation of everyone’s assessment might stimulate discussion among members of the senior team about the team’s strengths and weaknesses, which could reveal new insights about how the team has functioned in the past.

In addition to collecting data on the senior team, incoming deans could dedicate a subsequent meeting of the senior team to discuss their own approach to leading teams. Incoming deans might find it helpful to describe how their own identities and personal and professional experiences inside and outside of academe have shaped their perspective on leading and managing teams. Questions might include, “How does my experience as a faculty member influence how I define my role on the senior team?” and “What lessons – positive and negative – have I learned from watching other academic administrators lead teams?” A second set of questions could explore the incoming dean’s philosophy for leading the senior team. Questions might include “How do I try to encourage the

articulation of diverse perspectives during meetings of the senior team?” and “To what extent am I comfortable with members of the team disagreeing with me in team meetings?”

Despite the inherent vulnerability of disclosing these impressions, incoming deans might reap numerous benefits by describing their past experiences with teams and articulating their philosophy for meetings. First, incoming deans might engage in deep introspection to answer these questions; this reflection would prompt deans to formulate thoughtful responses and develop a clearer understanding of their role on the senior team. Second, the answers to these questions would provide members of the senior team some understanding of an incoming dean’s perspective, alerting them to the expectations of the new dean and revealing how these preferences differ from the previous dean’s approach. For this reason, an incoming dean might want to schedule a subsequent meeting of the senior team to integrate reflections about group dynamics under the previous dean, the incoming dean’s perspective and reactions of members of the senior team to the incoming dean’s preferences. In short, a dean would be prudent to establish a collective sense of expectations for the senior team that was co-constructed by their own perspective and the impressions of members of the senior team.

### **Conclusion**

The future vitality of premier public research universities such as Sprawling University cannot be taken for granted. Senior academic administrators continue to wrestle with a deteriorating economic and political environment. As explored in Chapter 1, this environment features stagnating, if not declining, state appropriations and

decreasing federal investment in research as well as calls from trustees to demonstrate restraint in raising tuition. It engenders a sustained sense of uncertainty across institutions, even if senior administrators are no longer shocked by its pressures. For public research universities, the predicament is not if institutions need to do more with less, but how much more needs to be done with just how few resources.

In recent decades, presidents and provosts at public research universities such as Sprawling University have adopted prudent strategies in hopes of mitigating the ills of this deteriorating environment. To date, most strategies have privileged constraint over austerity, avoiding drastic cuts to academic programs. While presidents have extolled and completed lucrative fundraising campaigns, provosts have recalibrated expectations for expenditures (in the form of cost containment) and redesigned the financial foundations of colleges (in the form of decentralized, revenue-centered budget models). At Sprawling University, for example, over several decades of experimentation and refinement, provosts have amended not only the university's budgetary blueprint, but also its academic hierarchy. The inception of the Campus Budget model, for example, intensified decentralization across campus by extracting further authority for academic and fiscal affairs from the provost's office and situating it in dean's offices across campus.

This shift in authority has elevated the prominence of academic deans at many public research universities. Deans now function as the chief executives of their colleges, shedding previous monikers as middle managers who feel beholden to provosts. With their newfound authority, deans have emerged as pivotal figures who forge the fortunes of their institutions more than ever. The ingenuity of numerous individuals contributes to the fate of universities: the discoveries and tutelage of faculty; the planning and toiling of

administrators such as associate deans and administrative directors; the competence and care of staff; the curiosity and passion of students; and the diligence and foresight of trustees. Moreover, presidents and provosts shape the prosperity of institutions in critical ways as architects and stewards of the academic and fiscal enterprise.

Academic deans, however, might assume the most critical role in charting the fortunes of their colleges – and in the aggregate, for their universities – because they orchestrate these different efforts into coherent visions that mobilize and organize action in their colleges. The continual formulation of what to do, when to do it, how to do it and with whom to do it is the province of deans. This work rarely stops; in big and small ways, deans are shaping and making sense of academic priorities every day – when talking with faculty and their senior teams in meetings, when intercepted by determined colleagues in the hallway, when courting and convincing prospective donors, when courting and convincing prospective (and current) faculty, when updating the provost or president during standing (if abbreviated) meetings and when snatching a moment of reflection on planes and trains before and after professing the contributions of their colleges across the country and even globe.

Amidst this constant current of issues, problems and opportunities, the university annual budget review provides a sanctioned interruption for deans to take stock of their colleges. Milestones such as authoring annual budget memorandums and attending annual budget conferences constitute more than mechanisms for monitoring academic performance and promoting fiscal accountability. During the budget review, the dean's work entails much more than crunching numbers and penning compelling prose for budget documents. By pressing pause together, deans and their confidants, can generate

and refine new approaches to addressing problems, deepen commitments to familiar and fresh priorities and celebrate the college's triumphs. This purpose – formalizing opportunities for sensemaking – might be the most important function of the annual budget review because it invites deans to interrogate their college's past, clarify its present and invent its future. On campuses across the nation, this interpretive, imaginative and reflective work of deans can stimulate the development of academic priorities that will enable their colleges to secure a more prosperous future.

Albeit only one aspect of their work, a dean's approach to shaping academic priorities during the annual budget review reveals their broader approach to deaning. A dean's approach to the budget review demonstrates how they enact essential work, including establishing goals, mobilizing financial and human resources and communicating with colleagues. A dean's approach can rouse a sense of camaraderie and commitment in their college; associate deans and administrative directors, along with faculty, can extract a shared sense of purpose with the college's future direction and clarify their own contribution to broader visions for their college. Alternatively, deans can induce anxiety and confusion, spelling stagnation – or worse yet, descent – for a college if they ignore their role as orchestrators of ideas and interpretations.

By investigating and animating how deans shape academic priorities, I conclude that conventional articulations of leadership and management fail to capture the essence of deaning. Adages such as managers administer while leaders innovate or managers do things right while leaders do the right thing (Bennis, 2009) ring too superficial. Similarly, axioms such as management emphasizes coping with complexity whereas leadership prioritizes coping with change and management privileges problem solving whereas

leadership emphasizes inspiring (Kotter, 1990) present dichotomies that feel too artificial. The work of deans intersects activities often ascribed both to managers such as planning and solving problems and to leaders such as inspiring and organizing.

Instead a more descriptive set of interpersonal behaviors defines deaning. “Leading” and “managing” do not articulate the social complexity of a dean’s work; these labels feel imprecise – even lazy. Academic deans often possess a range of technical skills, but the essence of deaning at research universities such as Sprawling University entails demonstrating a refined set of interpersonal sensitivities: identifying what questions to ask and knowing how to ask them; remembering who has spoken and encouraging silent voices to contribute; knowing when, how and whom to ask for advice; listening to voices that validate hunches and those that test assumptions; knowing when to impose ideas and when to remain silent; and listening closely enough to ascertain the opinions and needs of colleagues up, down and across the institution. While job descriptions for open deanships tend to reference a catalogue of preferred experiences – administrative nouns – such as program management, resource allocation and strategic planning, a more insightful call would complement these prerequisites by underscoring the need for interpersonal sensitivities – social verbs – such as asking, listening and discussing. The essence of deaning entails mastering a set of everyday interpersonal behaviors to accomplish extraordinary feats for colleges and universities.

## APPENDIX A

### Potential Survey Questions:

#### Oversight of Decentralized Budget Models in Universities

##### *Balancing Academic & Fiscal Priorities Across the University*

- My provost articulates a clear academic vision for the university
- My provost articulates a clear fiscal vision for the university
- My provost consults with deans before making significant academic decisions
- My provost consults with deans before making significant fiscal decisions
- My provost privileges fiscal priorities at the expense of academic priorities
- My provost privileges academic priorities at the expense of fiscal priorities

##### *Stewarding the University's Budget Model*

- My provost takes their responsibility for budgetary oversight seriously
- My provost is an expert on the university's budget model
- My provost should understand the university's budget model better than they do
- Budget administrators in the provost's office are experts on the university's budget model
- Budget administrators in the provost's office should understand the university's budget model better than they do
- My provost effectively coordinates budgetary oversight in the provost's office
- My provost has sufficient discretionary funds to advance the university's strategic academic priorities
- My provost effectively communicates the budgetary expectations of trustees

##### *Scrutinizing Academic & Financial Planning in the Colleges*

- My provost understands my college's academic priorities
- My provost understands my college's fiscal situation
- During the university's budget review, my provost asks penetrating questions about my college's current academic priorities



- During the university's budget review, my provost asks penetrating questions about my college's academic planning for the future
- During the university's budget review, my provost asks penetrating questions about my college's current budget situation
- During the university's budget review, my provost asks penetrating questions about my college's budget planning for the future

*Exploring the Efficacy of the Annual Budget Review*

- The university's budget review explores the most important fiscal issues in my college
- The university's budget review explores the most important academic issues in my college
- The university's budget review focuses on fiscal issues that do not really matter to my college
- The university's budget review focuses on academic issues that do not really matter to my college
- The university's budget review has real consequences for my college's budget
- The university's budget review has real consequences for my relationship with the provost
- The university's budget review is a waste of my time as dean
- I am an expert on my university's budget model
- I should understand my university's budget model better than I do

*Examining the University's Budget Call Letter*

- The university's budget call letter clearly signals the provost's academic priorities
- The university's budget call letter clearly signals the provost's fiscal priorities
- The university's budget call letter asks deans to respond to the right set of strategic questions
- The university's budget call letter is an effective mechanism for describing the current state of academic affairs in my college
- The university's budget call letter is an effective mechanism for describing the current state of fiscal affairs in my college
- My provost carefully examines my response to the budget call letter
- Budget administrators in the provost's office carefully examine my response to the budget call letter
- My provost might not read my response to the budget call letter
- I consider writing the response for the budget call letter as an important responsibility of being dean

### *Examining the University's Budget Hearing*

- The budget hearing with the provost features appropriate scrutiny of my college's academic planning
- The budget hearing with the provost should feature more scrutiny of my college's academic planning
- The budget hearing with the provost features sufficient scrutiny of my college's fiscal planning
- The budget hearing with the provost should feature more scrutiny of my college's fiscal planning
- The budget hearing with the provost focuses too much on academic issues that do not really matter to my college
- The budget hearing with the provost focuses too little on academic issues that really matter to my college
- The budget hearing with the provost focuses too much on fiscal issues that do not really matter to my college
- The budget hearing with the provost focuses too little on fiscal issues that really matter
- The provost should be asking me tougher questions in the budget hearing
- I take the budget hearing with the provost seriously
- The budget hearing with the provost is a waste of my time as dean
- The budget hearing with the provost is too ritualistic

### *Leveraging the Annual Budget Review in the College*

- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to discuss my college's academic priorities with my colleagues on the senior team
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to generate new ideas for academic priorities with my colleagues on the senior team
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to generate a collective sense of academic priorities among my colleagues on the senior team
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to increase commitment to our academic priorities among my colleagues on the senior team
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to discuss my college's fiscal priorities with my colleagues on the senior team
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to generate a collective sense of fiscal priorities among my colleagues on the senior team
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to discuss my college's academic priorities with my faculty colleagues in the college
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to generate new ideas for academic priorities with my faculty colleagues in the college
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to generate a collective sense of academic priorities among my faculty colleagues in the college

- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to increase commitment to the academic priorities among my faculty colleagues in the college
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to discuss my college's fiscal priorities with my faculty colleagues
- I use the university's budget review as an opportunity to generate a collective sense of fiscal priorities among my faculty colleagues in the college

*Leveraging the Annual Budget Review with the Provost*

- During the university's budget review, I frame my college's academic priorities as advancing the provost's academic priorities for the institution
- During the university's budget review, I explicitly frame my college's fiscal priorities as advancing the provost's fiscal priorities for the institution
- During the university's budget review, I am rewarded with financial resources for aligning the college's priorities to the provost's priorities
- During the university's budget review, I am rewarded with political capital for aligning the college's priorities to the provost's priorities
- During the university's budget review, my provost rewards their favorite deans with disproportionate resources
- During the university's budget review, my provost has sufficient discretionary resources to incentivize my alignment with the provost's office's priorities

## APPENDIX B

### Potential Survey Questions:

#### Stimulating Dialogue on Senior Administrative Teams

##### *Specifying Problems before Meetings*

- I come to meetings of the senior team with a clear idea of the best solution to the problems confronting the college
- I come to meetings of the senior team with a clear idea of the problems that are confronting the college
- I come to meetings of the senior team hoping to better understand the problems confronting the college
- I come to meetings of senior team with specific questions to ask my colleagues in hopes of better understanding the problems confronting the college
- I come to meetings of the senior team thinking that my colleagues can change my perspective on problems confronting the college
- I come to meetings of the senior team focused on advocating my preferred solution to problems confronting the college

##### *Framing Problems in Meetings*

- During meetings of the senior team, I provide background information on problems as a means of introducing discussion
- During meetings of the senior team, I articulate my own interpretation of problems as a means of introducing discussion
- During meetings of the senior team, I propose potential solutions to problems as a means of introducing discussion
- During meetings of the senior team, I disclose my preferred solution to problems as a means of introducing discussion
- During meetings of the senior team, I disclose when I am uncertain about a problem confronting the college while introducing discussion
- During meetings of the senior team, I disclose when I am confused about a problem confronting the college while introducing discussion

### *Encouraging Dialogue*

- During meetings of the senior team, I encourage my colleagues to be willing to disagree with each other
- During meetings of the senior team, I encourage my colleagues to be willing to disagree with me
- During meetings of the senior team, I am willing to disagree with my colleagues
- During meetings of the senior team, I feel compelled to referee disagreements among my colleagues
- During meetings of the senior team, I invite colleagues to offer ideas that have not been mentioned in discussion
- During meetings of the senior team, I call on specific colleagues to capture their perspective
- During meetings of the senior team, I call on quieter colleagues to capture their perspective
- During meetings of the senior team, I encourage my colleagues to articulate different perspectives to those that have already been articulated by other colleagues
- During meetings of the senior team, I am willing to articulate different perspectives than those already offered by my colleagues
- During meetings of the senior team, I invite members of the senior team to contribute their perspective on problems that fall outside of their area of responsibility
- During meetings of the senior team, I ask my colleagues whether everyone has contributed their ideas before closing conversation
- During meetings of the senior team, I assume responsibility for ending conversation once I feel that discussion has run its course

### *Constructing Collective Meaning*

- During meetings of the senior team, I summarize everyone's emerging perspective on problems throughout conversation
- During meetings of the senior team, I believe my colleagues expect me to summarize everyone's overall assessment of problems
- During meetings of the senior team, I want to reveal everyone's rationales for their perspectives on problems confronting the college
- During meetings of the senior team, I want everyone to agree with each other's interpretations of problems confronting the college
- During meetings of the senior team, I confirm with my colleagues whether my characterization of our discussion reflects their interpretations
- During meetings of the senior team, I ask my colleagues whether everyone has offered their perspectives on problems confronting the college
- During meetings of the senior team, I want everyone to understand everyone's perspective of the problems confronting the college
- During meetings of the senior team, I want everyone to accept a shared interpretation of problems confronting the college

- During meetings of the senior team, I want everyone to agree on a solution or solutions to the problems confronting the college
- During meetings of the senior team, I am willing to propose a course of action to address problems confronting the college that not everyone agrees with

## APPENDIX C

### Potential Survey Questions:

#### Self-Study of Senior Administrative Teams

##### *A. Questions for Members of the Senior Team*

###### *Exploring the Previous Dean's Role*

- How would you describe the previous dean's role on the senior team? To what extent was the previous dean the team's leader?
- To what extent did the previous dean consult and collaborate with the senior team to formulate the college's academic priorities?
- To what extent did the previous dean discuss budget issues with the senior team? To what extent did the previous dean seek the team's input on fiscal issues? To what extent did the previous dean consult and engage the team during the university's annual budget review?
- Under the previous dean, how did the senior team establish an agenda for meetings? To what extent did the previous dean control the agenda for the team's meetings?
- How did the previous dean introduce issues during meetings of the senior team? To what extent did the previous dean contextualize issues with background information? To what extent did the previous dean recommend solutions to issues before members of the team had the opportunity to explore issues in earnest?
- To what extent did the previous dean encourage the articulation of a diverse set of perspectives during meetings of the senior team? To what extent did the previous dean encourage the articulation of contrary or minority perspectives during meetings?
- During meetings of the senior team, did you ever censor your opinion because you believed the previous dean was not receptive to certain perspectives? To what extent did the previous dean discourage or suppress certain perspectives on the team? Did you censor your opinion because you believed that your colleagues on the team were not receptive to certain perspectives?
- During team meetings, to what extent did you feel comfortable debating issues as a team under the previous dean? How would you rate the ability of your colleagues to disagree constructively with one another during team meetings? To what extent did you feel comfortable disagreeing or challenging the previous dean in team meetings?
- During team meetings, to what extent did the previous dean encourage the senior team to push each other to formulate a rich set of potential alternatives when discussing issues or problems?

- To what extent do members of this team comment on issues that extend beyond their formal area of responsibility?

## *B. Questions for Incoming Deans*

### *Revealing Personal Experiences*

- How do I conceive of my role on this team? To what extent do I consider myself the leader of this team?
- How does my experience as a faculty member influence my conception of my role on this team?
- What other professional experiences most influence my conception of my role on this team?
- What lessons – both positive and negative – have I learned from watching other academic administrators lead teams? What positive lessons from them do I hope to adopt? What negative lessons from them do I hope to avoid?
- To what extent does my disciplinary background influence my approach to leading this team?
- What personal experiences most influence my conception of my role on this team?
- What personal qualities do I bring to this team that can contribute to its effectiveness? How am I most confident in my ability contribute to this team? How am I least confident in my ability contribute to this team?

### *Articulating A Meeting Philosophy*

- What are my preferences for setting agendas for meetings of the senior team? What role do I plan on assuming in creating the agenda?
- What issues or problems do I prefer to raise during meetings of the senior team? What issues or problems do I prefer to explore in one-on-one discussions with members of the team?
- How do I prefer to introduce issues during meetings? To what extent do I try to contextualize issues as an introduction to discussion? When do I try to offer my own assessment of issues during discussion? Do I prefer to voice my opinion sooner or later in the discussion? How willing am I to interrupt or cut-off discussion?
- To what extent do I believe that my voice as dean influences the team's discussion?
- To what extent do I try to encourage the articulation of a diverse set of perspectives during meetings of the senior team? To what extent do I encourage the articulation of contrary or minority perspectives during meetings?
- To what extent do I try to encourage debate as a team during meetings? How do I think we can debate and disagree in a constructive fashion as a team? To what extent am I comfortable with members of the team disagreeing with me in team meetings? What expectations and values should discipline and govern our interactions when we disagree in meetings?



- To what extent do I encourage the senior team to push each other to formulate a rich set of potential alternatives when discussing issues or problems?
- To what extent do I encourage members of the senior team to comment on issues and problems that extend beyond their formal area of responsibility?

## APPENDIX D

### Letter Requesting Participation

Dean's Name & Address

Date

Dear Dean \_\_\_\_\_:

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Nathan Harris and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan. I am conducting a dissertation about how deans shape and make sense of academic priorities during the annual budget review. I know you are very busy, but I am hoping you might consider participating in my study over this semester.

Despite the importance of your work as dean – after meeting with former deans, I am calling it the "bloody work" of translating academic and administrative operations into a blueprint for action – the deanship has been mostly ignored by researchers. Although education researchers describe some of what deans do, they have yet to explore how deans actually conduct their work.

My dissertation begins to address these gaps in understanding. Your participation would include three types of interactions: a) three 60-minute interviews with me over the next six months (one in January or February 2012, another in late-February or March 2012, and another in April, May, or June 2012); b) my observation of some meetings discussing the School's budget in February and March 2012; and c) my "shadowing" of you for several days over this semester. In addition to these interactions, I would conduct one 60-minute interview with several administrators in the college such as associate deans to better understand its academic priorities.

Due to the sensitive nature of my research, the identity of all participants, your college, and the university will remain confidential. My research plan has been approved by the University of Michigan's Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (HUM00057980) and follows its guidelines concerning confidentiality.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be thrilled to learn more about your work and discuss my dissertation with you. I am available via email at (nathan.f.harris@gmail.com) or telephone (734.546.5274). I have enclosed a summary of

my research plan if you are interested in learning more about my research design and conceptual approach.

Regards,

Nathan Harris

Nathan F. Harris  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Graduate Research Assistant  
The Center for the Study of Higher & Postsecondary Education  
Graduate Student Instructor  
Organizational Studies (LSA)  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

## APPENDIX E

### Informed Consent Form

#### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

*Making Sense of Academic Priorities:  
The Sensemaking and Sensegiving of Deans during the Annual Budget Process*

#### **Principal Investigator**

Mr. Nathan Harris, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Michigan  
Ed.M., Harvard University, B.A. Michigan State University

#### **Faculty Advisor**

Dr. Michael Bastedo, Associate Professor of Education, University of Michigan  
Ph.D. Stanford University, A.M. Stanford University, M.A. Boston College, B.A. Oberlin  
College

#### **Invitation to participate in a research study**

I invite you to participate in a research study about academic deans. The goal of this project is to better understand how deans use the university annual budget process to shape academic priorities. This research hopes to improve our understanding of how deans work to improve the academic quality of their schools. The study will be developed into academic presentations and journal articles in higher education and organizational studies.

#### **Description of subject involvement**

By signing this form, you agree to provide me with copies of documents about the annual budget process. Documents include email or letter correspondences, memorandums, and reports and presentations. With your consent, I will use these documents to develop a better understanding of the annual budget process in your school and across the University. You are providing these documents at your discretion; you can share some documents while withholding others.

#### **Benefits**

It is my hope that you will benefit from discussing your experiences as a form of professional reflection and development. In addition, other academic administrators might learn from your experiences about how to improve academic quality at their college or university.

#### **Risks and discomforts**

I have taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Yet you may still experience some risks related to your participation, even when I have been careful to avoid them. To reduce this risk, I am not disclosing the participant list to anyone but my faculty advisor. All documents will remain confidential, as described further below.

**Confidentiality**

I plan to publish the results of this study, but will not include any information that would identify you. Participants will be identified by generic versions of their title such as “anthropology department chair” or by pseudonyms. Academic units will be identified by generic forms such as “the liberal arts school” to further protect the identity of individuals. The university will be called "Midwest University." There are some reasons why other individuals may need to see information you provided as part of the study; this includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly, including the University of Michigan or government offices.

**Storage and future use of data**

Aside from IRB representatives and my faculty advisor, I will not divulge the identity of any participants. For all hardcopy documents, I will black-out (with a highlighter) specific identifiers – personal, departmental, school, and university identifiers – that could undermine confidentiality. All documents received via email (or email attachment) will be printed and sanitized in the same fashion; I will then destroy all electronic copies. I will keep the hardcopy copies as background material for future research in a locked file cabinet located in a locked office.

**Voluntary nature of the study**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time.

**Contact information**

If you have questions about this research, you may contact me, Nathan F. Harris (Ph.D. candidate, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, University of Michigan), via phone (734-546-5274) or email (nfharris@umich.edu). You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Michael Bastedo, at 734-272-4991 or bastedo@umich.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E Liberty St., Ste 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, 734-936-0933 or [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu).

**Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact me if you think of a question later.

*I agree to provide documents for this study*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX F

### Interview Protocols

*Making Sense of Academic Priorities:  
The Sensemaking and Sensegiving of Deans During the Annual Budget Process*

Dean Interview #1 (background interview)

1. I'd first like to learn about your path to the deanship. You've been a dean for [INSERT NUMBER] years. How exactly did you become dean of the School of [INSERT NAME]?
2. How have your previous academic and professional experiences prepared you for the deanship?
3. Okay let's talk about the College of [INSERT NAME]. How would you describe the College's current academic priorities?
4. How would you describe your role in shaping these academic priorities?
  - BONUS [*time permitting*]: To what extent did the recent campus-wide strategic planning process shape these academic priorities?
5. To what extent is there consensus on these priorities within the college?
6. Whose perspectives have primarily shaped these academic priorities?
7. Let's discuss your communication style as dean. What types of communication – actions, behaviors – are most important for shaping College's academic priorities?
  - BONUS [*time permitting*]: To what extent do you discuss the College's academic priorities differently depending on your audience?
8. What role do the faculty expect you to assume in shaping the College's academic priorities?
  - BONUS [*time permitting*]: What role do department chairs expect you to assume in shaping the College's academic priorities?

- BONUS [*time permitting*]: What role do associate deans expect you to assume in shaping the College's academic priorities?
9. What role does the provost expect you to assume in shaping the College's academic priorities?
  10. I'd like to discuss finances for a moment. How do you approach managing the the College's academic priorities and balancing the College's budget?
  11. How does the annual budget process shape your own understanding of the academic priorities within the College?
    - BONUS [*time permitting*]: I suspect that we've already touched on this theme at least in part, but in your experience, what are the most important dimensions of being a dean?
    - BONUS [*time permitting*]: Some research on deans suggests that deans require keen political skills. To what extent do you believe political behavior is a central component of shaping academic priorities as a dean?
    - BONUS [*time permitting*]: What political behaviors do you consider most important to your approach as dean?

*Dean Interview #2 (during the budget review)*

*\*Note: The background interviews with deans as well as the observations are likely to inform the second-round interview questions for deans.*

1. You have been meeting with the provost's staff about the College's academic priorities within the context of next year's budget. Let's discuss your preparation for these discussions in some detail. For starters, to what extent does last year's discussion of academic priorities affect the articulation of academic priorities during this year's budget cycle?
2. Walk me through the process of crafting the reports and presentations for budget meetings with the provost's staff. What is your process for organizing different people inside the College to prepare for these budget meetings with the provost?
3. I know it is a sensitive question, but the advice or counsel of what individuals most influences the actual articulation of academic priorities in budget documents for the provost's staff?
4. How do you and your team evaluate and decide what "evidence" – data or information – about academic priorities to emphasize in budget documents for the provost's staff?

5. To what extent do you and your staff deliberately use or avoid certain language to describe the College's academic priorities in these documents? Why?
6. What factors influence how you organize or structure the discussion of academic priorities in your budget documents?
7. How would you describe your role in crafting budget documents for the provost's staff?
8. How has your experience as dean shaped your preparation for budget meetings with the provost's staff?
9. Before you met with the provost's staff, to what extent were there differences in opinion within the College about how to articulate academic priorities in budget documents?
  - How did you reconcile disagreements about how to articulate academic priorities in budget documents?
10. During meetings with the provost and the provost's staff, to what extent did you and the provost's staff share the same perspective about the College's academic priorities?
11. To what extent did anything surprise you about the discussion of the School's academic priorities in meetings with the provost or the provost's staff?
12. In these budget meetings with the provost's staff, to what extent did you communicate the storyline you wanted to convey about the School's academic priorities?
13. During this year's budget process, to what extent have you learned or realized anything new about the College's academic priorities?
14. During this year's budget process, have you learned or realized anything new about the University's academic priorities?



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adler, P.A. & Adler, P. (1987). *Membership roles in the field*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Qualitative Research Methods, Series 6.
- Adler, P.A., & Adler, P. (1994). Observational techniques. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 377–392). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Allard-Poesi, F. (2005). The paradox of sensemaking in organizational analysis. *Organization* 12(2), 169-96.
- Albert, S., & Whetten, D. (1985). Organizational identity. L. L. Cummings, B. M. Staw, (Eds.) *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 7 (pp. 263-295). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Alvesson, M. & Kärreman, D. (2007). Constructing mystery: Empirical matters in theory development. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1265-1281.
- Alvesson, M., Lee Ashcraft, K., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organization*, 15(1), 5-28.
- American Academy of Arts & Sciences (2016a). *Public research universities. Recommitting to Lincoln's vision: An educational compact for the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA.
- American Academy of Arts & Sciences (2016b). *Public research universities. Understanding the financial model*. Cambridge, MA.
- American Conference of Academic Deans (2014). *The resource handbook for academic deans*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.
- American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). (2016 January 15). *Federal R&D budget trends: A short summary*. Washington, DC: AAAS.
- Argyris, C., Putnam, R. & Smith, D.M. (1985). *Action science: Concepts, methods, and skills for research and intervention*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). (2010). *2010 public institution and university system financial conditions survey*. Washington, DC: AGB.
- Astley, W. G. (1985). Administrative science as socially constructed truth. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 30(4), 497-513.
- Astley, W. G. & Van de Ven, A. H. (1983). Central perspectives and debates in organization theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28(2), 245-273.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Baldrige, J. V. (1971). *Power and conflict in the university*. New York: John Wiley.
- Balogun, J. & Johnson, G. (2005). From intended strategies to unintended outcomes: The impact of change recipient sensemaking. *Organization Studies* 26(11), 1573 - 1601.
- Barley, S. R. (2006). When I write my masterpiece: Thoughts on what makes a paper interesting. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(1), 16–20.
- Barnard, C. (1938/1968). *The functions of the executive*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bartunek, J., Krim, R., Necochea, R., & Humphries, M. (1999). Sensemaking, sensegiving, and leadership in strategic organizational development. In J. Wagner (ed.), *Advances in qualitative organizational research*, vol. 2 (pp. 37-71). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Bate, J. (1997). Whatever happened to organizational anthropology? A review of the field of organizational ethnography and anthropological studies. *Human Relations* 50(9), 1147–75.
- Bennis, W. (2009). *On becoming a leader: The leadership classic revised and updated*. Philadelphia, PA: Perseus.
- Bensimon, E. & Neumann, A. (1993). *Redesigning collegiate leadership*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press
- Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality*. New York: Doubleday.
- Birnbaum, R. (1988). *How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Birnbaum, R. (1992). *How academic leadership works: Understanding success and failure in the college presidency*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Blackburn, R. & Lawrence, J. (1995). *Faculty at work: Motivation, expectation, satisfaction*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bray, N.J. (2008). Proscriptive norms for academic deans: Comparing faculty expectations across institutional and disciplinary boundaries. *Journal of Higher Education* 79(6), 692-721.
- Bray, N.J. (2010). The deanship and its faculty interpreters: Do Mertonian norms of science translate into norms for administration? *Journal of Higher Education* 81(3), 284-316.
- Bright, D.F. & Richards, M. P. (2001). *The academic deanship: Individual careers and institutional roles*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brown, A. D. (2005). Making sense of the collapse of Barings Bank. *Human Relations*, 58(12), 1579-1604.
- Brown, A.D., Stacey, P., & Nandhakumar, J. (2008). Making sense of sensemaking narratives. *Human Relations* 61(8), 1035-1062.
- Burrell, G. & Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis*. London: Heinemann.
- Campbell, D.T. (1965). Variation and selective retention in sociocultural evolution. H. R. Barringer, G. I. Blanksten, R. Mack (Eds.), *Social Change in Developing Areas* (pp. 19-49). Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.
- Campbell, D.T. (1997). From evolutionary epistemology via selection theory to a sociology of scientific validity. *Evolution Cognition*, 3(1), 5–38.
- Carlson, S. (2015 February 9). Colleges “unleash the deans” with decentralized budgets. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Chia, R. (2000). Discourse analysis as organizational analysis. *Organization*, 7(3), 513–518.
- Clark, B.R. (1983a). *The higher education system: Academic organization in cross national perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Clark, B. R. (1983b). The contradictions of change in academic systems. *Higher Education* 12(1), 101–116.
- Clark, B.R. (1987). *The academic life*. Princeton: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Cohen, M.D. & March, J.G. (1974/1986). *Leadership and ambiguity*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Conrad, C. F. (1978). A grounded theory of academic change. *Sociology of Education*, 51(2), 101–112.
- Cooley, C.H. (1902). *Human nature and the social order*. New York: Scribner.
- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3-21.
- Corbin, J.M. & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Corson, J.J. (1960). The university: A contrast in administrative process. *Public Administration Review*, 20(1), 2-9
- Corvellec, H., & Risberg, A. (2007). Sensegiving as mise-en-sens: The case of wind power development. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 23(3), 306-326.
- Crandall, B., Klein, G., & Hoffman, R. R. (2006). *Working minds: A practitioner's guide to cognitive task analysis*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Crozier, M. (1964). The Bureaucratic phenomenon. An examination of bureaucracy in modern organizations and its cultural setting in France. *FIND FULL APA CITE*.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2001). Managers as practical authors: Reconstructing our understanding of management practice. *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(3), 351-371.
- Cunliffe, A. L., & Eriksen, M. (2011). Relational leadership. *Human Relations*, 64(11), 1425-1449.
- Cunliffe A. & Coupland C. (2012). From hero to villain to hero: Making experience sensible through embodied narrative sensemaking. *Human Relations*, 65(1), 63–88.
- Curry, J. R., Laws, A. L., & Strauss, J. C. (2013). *Responsibility center management: A guide to balancing academic entrepreneurship with fiscal responsibility*. Washington, DC: NACUBO.

- Czarniawska, B. (2004). On time, space, and action nets. *Organization* 11(6), 773–791.
- Dawson, P. & Buchanan, D. (2005). The way it *really* happened: Competing narratives in the political process of technological change. *Human Relations* 58(7), 845-865.
- Del Favero, M. (2005). The social dimension of academic discipline as a discriminator of academic deans' administrative behavior. *Review of Higher Education* 29(1), 69-96.
- Del Favero, M. (2006). An examination of the relationship between academic discipline and cognitive complexity in academic deans' administrative behavior. *Research in Higher Education* 47(3), 281-315.
- Del Favero, M. & Bray, N.J. Herding cats and big dogs: Tensions in the faculty Administrator relationship. In J.C. Smart (ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research*, (pp. 477-541).
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. Boston, MA: D.C. Heath.
- Dibden, A. J. (1968). *Academic deanship in American colleges and universities*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Dill, W.R. (1980). The deanship: An unstable craft. In D.E. Griffiths & D.J. McCarty (eds.), *The dilemma of the deanship*, (pp. 261-284). Danville, IL: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc.
- Dunford, R. & Jones, D. (2000). Narrative in strategic change. *Human Relations* 53(9): 1207-1226.
- Dutton, J.E., & Ashford, S.J. (1993). Selling issues to top management. *Academy of Management Review*, 18(3): 397-428.
- Dutton, J.E., Ashford, S.J., O'Neill, R.M., & Lawrence, K.A. (2001). Moves that matter: Issue selling and organizational change. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4): 716-736.
- Dupont, G. E. (1968). The dean and his office. In A. J. Dibben (Ed.), *The academic deanship in American colleges and universities*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Eckel, P. (2002). Decision rules used in academic program closure: Where the rubber meets the road. *Journal of Higher Education* 73(2):237-262.
- Eisenberg, E. M. (1990). Jamming: Transcendence through organizing. *Communication Research*, 17(2), 139-164.

- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 532–550.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1): 25–32.
- English, D. & Kramer, R. (2017 May 31). Can deans fix higher-ed dysfunction? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Fagin, C.M. (1997). The leadership role of a dean. *New Directions for Higher Education* (Summer 1997), 95-99.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Feltner, B.D. & Goodsell, D.R. (1972). The academic dean and conflict management. *Journal of Higher Education* 43(9), 692-701.
- Fine, G. A. (1993). Ten lies of ethnography: Moral dilemmas of field research. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22(3), 267-294.
- Follett, M.P. (1924). *Creative experience*. New York: Longmans, Green, & Company.
- Fryer, M. (2012). Facilitative leadership: drawing on Jürgen Habermas’ model of ideal speech to propose a less impositional way to lead. *Organization*, 19(1), 25-43.
- Fuller, R., Morton, P. D., & Korschgen, A. (2005). Incentive-based budgeting: Lessons from public higher education. In J.E. Groccia, J. E. & Miller (Eds.), *On becoming a productive university: Strategies for reducing cost and increasing quality in higher education*, Vol. 52 (34-43 ). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gardner, L. (2014 August 2014). States are giving colleges more but want more back. *Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Gates, G. S. (1997). Isomorphism, Homogeneity, and Rationalism in University Retrenchment. *Review of Higher Education*, 20(3), 253-275.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gephart R.P., Topal C. & Zhan Z. (2010). Future-oriented sensemaking: Temporalities and institutional legitimation. In T. Hernes T and S. Maitlis S (eds), *Process, Sensemaking, and Organizing* (275-312).. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gioia, D. A. & Chittipeddi, K. (1991). Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 12(6), 433-448.

- Gioia, D. A. & Pitre, E. (1990). Multiparadigm perspectives on theory building. *Academy of Management Review*, 15(4), 584-602.
- Gioia, D. A., Thomas, J. B., Clark, S. M., & Chittipeddi, K. (1994). Symbolism and Strategic change in academia: The dynamics of sensemaking and influence. *Organization Science* 5, 363-383.
- Gioia, D. A. & Thomas, J. B. (1996). Identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41, 370-403.
- Gioia, D. A., & Mehra, A. (1996). Sensemaking in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 21(4), 1226.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *Discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Adline.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers*. New York: Longman.
- Gmelch, W. H., Wolverson, M., Wolverson, M. L., & Sarros, J. C. (1999). The academic dean: An imperiled species searching for balance. *Research in Higher Education*, 40(6), 717-740.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gould, J. W. (1964). *The academic deanship*. Institute of Higher Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Gumport, P. J. (1993). Contested terrain of academic program reduction. *Journal of Higher Education*, 64(3), 283-311.
- Gumport, P. J. & Pusser, B. (1995). A case of bureaucratic accretion: Context and consequences. *Journal of Higher Education*, 66(5), 493-520.
- Gumport, P. J. & Pusser, B. (1999). University restructuring: The role of economic and political contexts. In J. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research (vol. XIV)* (pp. 146-200). New York: Agathon.

- Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action. Vol. 1: Reason and the rationalization of society.* (T. McCarthy, trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The theory of communication action. Vol. 2: Lifeworld and system: A Critique of functionalist reason.* (T. McCarthy, trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (2001). On the pragmatics of social interaction. (B. Fultner, trans.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hammer, D. & Wildavsky, A. (1993). The open-ended, semistructured interview: An (almost) operational guide. In A. Wildavsky, *Craftways: On the organization of scholarly work.* New Brunswick: Transaction.
- Hanzeli, V.E. (1966). The education leadership of the academic dean. *Journal of Higher Education* 37(8): 421-428.
- Hatch, M. J. (1999). Exploring the empty spaces of organizing: How improvisational jazz helps redescribe organizational structure. *Organization studies*, 20(1), 75-100.
- Hardy, C. (1990). “Hard” decisions and “tough” choices: The business approach to university decline. *Higher Education*, 20(3): 301–321.
- Hearn, J. C. (1996). Transforming U.S. higher education: An organizational perspective. *Innovative Higher Education* 21(2): 141–154.
- Hearn, J. C., Lewis, D. R., Kallsen, L., Holdsworth, J. M., & Jones, L. M. (2006). “Incentives for managed growth”: A case study of incentives-based planning and budgeting in a large public research university. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 77(2), 286-316.
- Hermanowicz, J. C. (2002). The great interview: 25 strategies for studying people in bed. *Qualitative Sociology* 25(4), 479–499.
- Hickson, D. J., Hinings, C. R., Lee, C. A., Schneck, R. E., & Pennings, J. M. (1971). A strategic contingencies' theory of intraorganizational power. *Administrative science quarterly*, 216-229.
- James, W. (1890/1950). *The principles of psychology* (Vols. 1 & 2). New York: Dover.
- James, W. (1892). *Psychology: The briefer course.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- June, A.W. (2014 November 28). To change a campus, Talk to the dean. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, A18.



- Kayes, D.C. (2004). The 1996 Mount Everest climbing disaster: The breakdown of learning in teams. *Human Relations* 57(10), 1263-1284.
- Kelderman, E. (2014 November 4). Outcome of governors' races could shift higher-ed policy in several states. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Kelderman, E. (2015 May 17). Why no autonomy means all pain, no gain for Wisconsin's university system. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Kelderman, E. (2016 March 2). A grim budget picture means even more pain for Louisiana's colleges. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Kerr, C. (1963). *The uses of the university*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kezar, A., & Eckel, P.D. (2004). Meeting today's governance challenges: A synthesis of The literature and examination of a future agenda for scholarship. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75(4), 371-399.
- Kotter, J.P. (1990 May-June). What leaders really do. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(3), 103-111.
- Krahenbuhl, G.S. (2004). *Building the academic deanship*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lang, D. W. (2002). Responsibility center budgeting at the University of Toronto. In D.M. Priest, W.E. Becker, D. Hossler, & E.P. St. John (Eds.), *Incentive-based budgeting systems in public universities* (pp. 111-135). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Lasher, W. F., & Sullivan, C. A. (2004). Follow the money: The changing world of budgeting in higher education. In *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 197-240).
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and Emerging confluences. In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.) *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 163-188). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lombardi, J.V. (2013). *How universities work*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lorino, P., Tricard, B., & Clot, Y. (2011). Research methods for non-representational approaches to organizational complexity: The dialogical mediated inquiry. *Organization Studies*, 32(6), 769-801.

- Louis, M. R. (1980). Surprise and sense making: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25(2), 226-251.
- Maitlis, S. (2005). The social processes of organizational sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal* 48(1): 21-49.
- Maitlis, S., & Lawrence, T. B. (2007). Triggers and enablers of sensegiving in organizations. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(1), 57-84.
- Maitlis, S. & Sonenshein, S. (2010). Sensemaking in crisis and change: Inspiration and Insights from Weick. *Journal of Management Studies* 47(3), 551-580.
- Marcus, L. R. (1997). Restructuring state higher education governance patterns. *Review of Higher Education*, 20(4): 399-418.
- Martin, P.Y. & Turner, B.A. (1986). Grounded theory and organizational research. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 22(2): 141-157.
- Massy, W. F. (1996). Reengineering resource allocation systems. In W. F. Massy (Ed.), *Resource allocation in higher education* (pp. 15 – 48). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Masterman, M. (1970). The nature of a paradigm. In I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (Eds.), *Criticism and the growth of knowledge* (pp. 59-89). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maxwell, J. A. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review* 62(3), 279-300.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Mead, G. H. (1956). *The social psychology of George Herbert Mead*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Melchiori, G.S. (1982). Smaller and better: The University of Michigan experience. *Research in Higher Education* 16(1): 55-69.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Milam, J.H. (1991). The presence of paradigms in the core higher education journal literature. *Research in Higher Education* 32(6): 651-668.
- Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The nature of managerial work*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Mintzberg, H. (1979). An emerging strategy of "direct" research. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24(4): 582-589
- Mintzberg, H. (2005). Developing theory about the development of theory. In K.G. Smith & M.A. Hitt (eds.) *Great minds in management: The process of theory development*. (pp. 355-372). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Montez, J.M., Wolverton, M. and Gmelch, W.H. (2002). The roles and challenges of deans. *Review of Higher Education* 26(2), 241-266.
- Moody's Investor Services. (2015a December 2). US Higher Education Outlook: Modest revenue growth supports sector stability. New York, NY.
- Moody's Investor Services. (2015b December 2). Announcement: Modest revenue growth supports stable outlook for US higher education in 2016. New York, NY.
- Morgan, G. (1979). Response to Mintzberg. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(1), 137-139.
- Morgan, G. (1980). Paradigms, metaphors, and puzzle solving in organization theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24(4),605-622.
- Morgan, G. (1997). *Images of organization* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Morphew, C. (2000). The realities of strategic planning: Program termination at East Central University. *The Review of Higher Education*, 23(3), 257-280.
- Morris, V.C. (1981). *Deaning*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine. (2007). *Rising above the gathering storm: Energizing and employing America for a brighter economic future*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/11463>.
- National Governors Association (NGA). (2011a). *Degrees for what jobs?* Washington, DC: NGA.
- National Governors Association (NGA). (2011b). *Making education dollars work*. Washington, DC: NGA.
- National Governors Association (NGA). (2011c July 15). *Innovation and economic growth are focus of NGA annual meeting opening session. Governors look to universities as a catalyst for economic growth*. Washington, DC: NGA.

- National Research Council. (2012). *Research universities and the future of America: Ten breakthrough actions vital to our nation's prosperity and security*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/13396>.
- National Science Board (NSB). 2012. *Diminishing funding and rising expectations: Trends and challenges for public research universities, A companion to science and engineering indicators 2012*. Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation (NSB-12-45).
- National Science Board. (2014). *Science and engineering indicators 2014*. Arlington VA: National Science Foundation (NSB 14-01).
- National Science Foundation. (2015). NCSES Info Brief. *Higher education R&D expenditures resume slow growth in FY 2013*. Arlington VA: National Science Foundation (NSF 15-314).
- National Science Foundation. (2016). NCSES Info Brief. Universities report fourth straight year of declining federal R&D funding in FY 2015. Arlington VA: National Science Foundation (NSF 17-303).
- Paget, M.A. (1988). *The unity of mistakes*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Patriotta, G. & Spedale, S. (2009). Making sense through face: Identity and social interaction in a consultancy task force. *Organization Studies* 30(11), 1227-1248.
- Perrow, C. (1970). *Organizational analysis: A sociological view*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Peterson, M. & White, T. (1992). Faculty and administrative perceptions of their environments. *Research in Higher Education*, 33(2): 177-204.
- Pfeffer, J. (1981). Management as symbolic action: The creation and maintenance of organizational paradigms. In: L.L Cummings & B.A. Staw (eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior* (pp. 1-52). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Pfeffer, J. & Salancik, G.R. (1974). Organizational decision making as a political process: The case of a university budget. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 19(2), 135-151.
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The external control of organizations*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Phillips, D. C. (1987). Validity in qualitative research: Why the worry about warrant will Not wane. *Education and Urban Society*, 20(1): 9–24.
- Pondy, L. R. (1978). Leadership is a language game. In M. W. McCall and M. M. Lombardo (eds.) *Leadership: Where else can we go?* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Podolny, J. M., Khurana, R., & Hill-Popper, M. (2005). Revisiting the meaning of leadership. In: B. Staw & R. Kramer (eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior* (pp. 1-36). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Porter, R., Zemsky, R. & Oedel, P. (1979). Adaptive planning: The role of institution specific models. *Journal of Higher Education*, 50(5):586-601.
- Priest, D. M., Becker, W. E., Hossler, D., & St. John, E. P. (Eds.). (2002). *Incentive based budgeting systems in public universities*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Raelin, J. A. (2013). The manager as facilitator of dialogue. *Organization*, 20(6), 818-839.
- Rhoades, G. (2000). Who's doing it right? Strategic activity in public research universities. *The Review of Higher Education* 24(1), 41-66.
- Riesman, D. (1956). *Constraint and variety in American education*. Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press.
- Roaden, A.L. (1970). The college deanship: A new middle management in higher education. *Theory into Practice* 9(4): 272-276.
- Roper, S.S. & Deal, T.E. (2010). *Peak performance for deans and chairs: Reframing higher education's middle*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Rosser, V.J., Johnsrud, L.K., & Heck, R.H. (2003). Academic deans and directors: Assessing their effectiveness from individual and institutional perspectives. *Journal of Higher Education* 74(1), 1-25.
- Rouleau, L. (2005). Micro-practices of strategic sensemaking and sensegiving: How middle managers interpret and sell change every day. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(7), 1413-1441.
- Rouleau, L. & Balogun, J. (2010). Middle managers, strategic sensemaking, and Discursive competence. *Journal of Management Studies* 48(5), 1-38.
- Rubin, I. (1979). Retrenchment, loose structure, and adaptability in the university. *Sociology of Education*, 52(4), 211–222.

- Ryan, D.W. (1980). Deans as individuals-in-organizations. In D.E. Griffiths & D.J. McCarty (eds.), *The dilemma of the deanship*, (pp. 261-284). Danville, IL: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc.
- Salancik, G. R., & Pfeffer, J. (1974). The bases and use of power in organizational decision making: The case of a university. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 453-473.
- Schutz, A. (1967). *The phenomenology of the social world*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Scott, W.R. (2001). *Institutions and organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Selznick, P. (1957/1984). *Leadership in administration: A sociological interpretation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Slaughter, S. (1993). Retrenchment in the 1980's: The politics of prestige and gender. *Journal of Higher Education*, 64, 250 –282
- Sloat, J. M. (2014). Developing productive relationships with assistant and associate deans: What they might want you to know. In L. L. Behling (Ed.), *The resource handbook for academic deans* (pp. 249 – 254). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Smerek, R. E. (2013). Sensemaking and new college presidents: A conceptual study of the transition process. *The Review of Higher Education*, 36(3), 371-403.
- Smircich, L. & Morgan, G. (1982). Leadership: The management of meaning. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 18(3), 257-273.
- Standard & Poor's Global Market Intelligence. (2016 July 11). U.S. public college and university fiscal 2015 median ratios: Sector adjusting to the 'new normal' as industry pressure remains. New York, NY.
- Starbuck, W. H. & Milliken, F. J. (1988). Executive perceptual filters: What they notice and how they make sense. In D. C. Hambrick (ed.) *The executive effect: Concepts and methods for studying top managers*. (pp. 35-65). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Stark, J. S., Lowther, M. A., Sharp, S., & Arnold, G. L. (1997). Program-level curriculum planning: An exploration of faculty perspectives on two different campuses. *Research in Higher Education* 38(1), 99–130.
- Staw, B. M. (1980). Rationality and justification in organizational life. In B. M. Staw & L. L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior*, Volume 2 (pp. 45 80). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

- Staw, B.M. (1981). The escalation of commitment to a course of action. *Academy of Management Review*, 6(4): 577-587.
- Stigliani, I., & Ravasi, D. (2012). Organizing thoughts and connecting brains: Material practices and the transition from individual to group-level prospective sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(5), 1232-1259.
- Stocum, D. L., & Rooney, P. M. (1997, September/October). Responding to resource constraints: A departmentally based system of responsibility center management. *Change*, 29 (5), 51–57.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1990/1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, J. C. & Curry, J. R. (2002). Responsibility Center Management: Lessons from 25 years of decentralized management. Washington, DC: NACUBO.
- Suddaby, R. (2006). From the editors: What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), 633-642.
- Taylor, J. R., E. J. Van Every. (2000). *The emergent organization: Communication as its site and surface*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Thayer, L. (1988). Leadership/communication: A critical review and a modest proposal. In G. M. Goldhaber & G. A. Barnett (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational communication* (pp. 231-263). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Thompson, J. D. (1967). *Organizations in action: Social science bases of administrative theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Tierney, W.G. (1989). *Curricular landscapes, Democratic vistas*. New York: Falmer Press.
- Tsoukas, H. & Chia, R. (2002). On organizational becoming: Rethinking organizational change. *Organization Science*, 13(5), 567-582.
- Tucker, A. & Bryan, R.A. (1988). *The academic dean: Dove, dragon, and diplomat*. New York: Macmillan Publishers.
- Twombly, S.B. (1992). The process of choosing a dean. *Journal of Higher Education* 66(6), 653-683.
- Van Maanen, J. (1979). The fact of fiction in organizational ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 24(4), 539–550.

- Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Van Maanen, J., Sørensen, J. B., Mitchell, T. R. (2007). The interplay between theor and method. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1145-1154.
- Weaver, G. R. & Gioia, D. A. (1994). Paradigms lost: Incommensurability vs structurationist inquiry. *Organization Studies*, 15(4), 565-590.
- Weber, M. (1946). *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology*, H. H. Gerth & C.W. Mills (Eds.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society (volume two)*. C. Wittich & G. Roth (Eds.). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Weick, K.E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing* (2nd edition). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory construction as disciplined imagination. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 516-531.
- Weick, K.E. (1990). The vulnerable system: An analysis of the Tenerife air disaster. *Journal of Management* 16, 571-593.
- Weick, K. E. (1993). The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38, 628-652.
- Weick, K.E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Weick, K.E. (2005). The experience of theorizing. In K.G. Smith & M.A. Hitt (eds.) *Great minds in management: The process of theory development*. (pp. 394-413). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weick, K. E. (2012). Organized sensemaking: A commentary on processes of interpretive work. *Human Relations*, 65(1), 141-153.
- Weick, K.E., Sutcliffe, K.M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science* 16(4), 409-421.
- Weick, K.E. (2008). Sensemaking. In S.R. Clegg & J.R. Bailey (Eds.) *International encyclopedia of organization studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York: Free Press.



- Westley, F. R. (1990). Middle managers and strategy: Microdynamics of inclusion. *Strategic Management Journal*, 11(5):337–351.
- Whalen, E. L. (1991). *Responsibility center budgeting: An approach to decentralized management for institutions of higher education*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Whalen, E. L. (2002). The case, if any, for responsibility center budgeting. In D. M. Priest, W. E. Becker, D. Hossler, & E. P. St. John (Eds.), *Incentive-based Budgeting systems in public universities* (pp. 111–135). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Whetten, D.A. (1981). Organizational responses to scarcity: Exploring the obstacles to innovative approaches to retrenchment in education. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 17(3), 80-97.
- Whetten, D. A. (1984). Effective administrators: Good management on the college campus. *Change* (November-December): 38-43.
- Wicks, D. (2002). Institutionalized mindsets of invulnerability: Differentiated institutional fields and the antecedents of organizational crisis. *Organization Studies* 22(4): 659–92.
- Winograd, T. & Flores, F. (1986). *Understanding computers and cognition*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Wiseman, R. (2011 August 21). Hunkering down, colleges rethink financial strategies. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Wisniewski, R. (1998). The New Sisyphus: The Dean as Change Agent. In D. Thiessen & K.R. Howrey (Eds.), *Agents, provocateurs: Reform-minded leaders for schools of education* (pp. 49-58). Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1990). On seeking – and rejecting – validity in qualitative research. In E. W. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education: The continuing debate* (pp. 121-152). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wolverton, M. Gmelch, W.H., Montez, J., & Nies, C.T. (2001). *The changing nature of the academic deanship*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, Volume 28, Number 1. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wolverton, M., Wolverton, M. L., & Gmelch, W. H. (1999). The impact of role conflict and ambiguity on academic deans. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 70(1), 80-106.

Wright, C. R., & Manning, M. R. (2004). Resourceful sensemaking in an administrative group. *Journal of Management Studies*, 41(4), 623-643.

Yarger, S.J. (1998). Addressing the dean's dilemma. In D. Thiessen & K.R. Howrey (Eds.), *Agents, provocateurs: Reform-minded leaders for schools of education* (pp. 127-142). Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Zemsky, R., Porter, R., & Oedel, L. P. (1978). Decentralized planning: To share responsibility. *Educational Record*, 59, 229 –253.