The Experiences of Academic Leaders in an Era of Transformation:
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Leadership Effectiveness

by

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ABSTRACT

This study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the perceptions and sensemaking of eight academic leaders in the Northeast of the U.S. as they considered their leadership experience and sought to understand the elements that impacted their leadership effectiveness in their role. The study adopted the theoretical framework of full-range leadership theory by Bass and Avolio (1994) conjoined with Pinos’ (2006) correlational model of leadership with emotional intelligence. The findings of this study revealed that participants became leaders advancing from their teaching roles; that they emphasized the importance of leadership training and development as an organizational priority; and they believed that their behaviors can influence their effectiveness in the role. Further, the participants reflected and made sense of their leadership effectiveness by citing their self-awareness, reflection, vision, empathy, openness to feedback as essential hallmarks of effective leadership in higher education today; and that they believed effective and sustainable leadership would be able to confront transformation drivers. Finally, these academic leaders adopted the transformational leadership model as part of their leadership effectiveness efforts as they furthered the vision of their leaders and communicated their own vision during a transformational time for their organizations. Their sensemaking of their own effectiveness as transformation leaders was shared with stakeholders. These findings may illuminate an understanding of influences on leadership effectiveness, and they may help future senior academic leaders to become aware of the leadership behaviors, traits, and capabilities they will need to develop to enhance their effectiveness in their role in an era of transformation.

Key words: leadership effectiveness, emotional intelligence, transformational leadership
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Almost a decade ago, as a newly appointed leader, I had the opportunity to work with an executive coach, who introduced me to the concept of emotional intelligence. This opened a new window for me in my professional world. The more familiar I became with this new concept, the more I wanted to know about its applications and tools I could implement as a leader. During those years I was still on the quest of defining and solidifying my own leadership style.

My understanding of emotional intelligence deepened as I continued my studies and so did my passion for increasing awareness of the training and the tools that could be used to increase the emotional competence of professionals. Interviewing the participants to my study allowed me to witness in the real world the influence emotional intelligence has on the leadership style and leadership effectiveness, and I learned a lot from this experience. Providing opportunities for emotional intelligence and leadership training to my team became, and will always be, a priority for me as a leader.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my family, my husband and my son, who are the most important people in the world for me. They are always unwavering in their belief in me and my ability to reach the finish line of everything that I start, regardless of how long the journey is. My heartfelt thanks go to both of them. At the beginning of my program at Northeastern University, my son was a fourth grader at the time. When he heard that I will be studying leadership, he asked me, “What is a leader?” He looked up the word leader in the dictionary, and he read to me its definition: “a leader is a person who leads.” Fast forwarding a few years later, now my son is taller than I, and he plans to become a leader himself. Based on the early signs, I am confident he will become a strong leader.

Although my parents are not with me anymore, I feel they watch from above, and they continue to shower me with their love. I am deeply grateful to them for instilling in me the discipline, the strong moral values, and the steely determination to achieve every goal I set for myself. To my dear high school friend from Romania, whose full acceptance of all that I became during our longtime friendship, remained steadfast, no matter how far our life paths have taken us. We are still very close, even though now there is an ocean between us.

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Last, but definitely not least, I want to thank the participants to this study for taking the time from their busy day to speak with me. Their support was much appreciated. I am looking forward to providing a similar support in the future to other doctoral candidates.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The 21st century has brought forth significant challenges and the higher education system has “reached another critical juncture in its history” (Gagliardi et al., 2017, p. ix). In this new century, many higher education institutions have experienced declining student enrollment, higher expectations from constituents and stakeholders, stricter rules and regulations for international student recruitment, an exponential advancement of technology, reduced funding and endowments, and changing needs dictated by the workplace. To adjust and stay ahead of the changes in their environment, higher education institutions will have to implement innovative approaches. They have to find ways to engage their multigenerational student population, to include Generation Z students, to update institutional resources to keep up with the expectations of their digital native students, and to incorporate Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a regular component of student-centered activities.

Identifying an institution’s niche on the higher education landscape and differentiating it from the competition has become a standard expectation of educational leaders and is an integral part of their responsibilities for advancing the organization’s mission of educating tomorrow’s workforce. For example, leaders are responsible for launching new programs of study for jobs that just a few short years ago did not even exist, such as Social Media Analyst, Digital Marketing Strategist, and Social Media Content Designer. Leaders must also fulfill the institution’s social responsibilities for the community they serve, develop future professionals with a spirit of servicing their community, and model global citizens skills.

Moreover, with all this accelerated change and the emergence of a new environment in higher education, a large number of academic leadership positions in higher education institutions are currently held by C-level executives, such as Provosts, Deans of Academic Affairs (DAA) and Chief Academic Officers (CAO), who will be reaching retirement age in the
near future. The American College President Study (2017) reflected that the average age of a college or university president is 62 years old, and 58 percent of them are over 60 years old (Gagliardi et al., 2017). This anticipated retirement of high-level academic executives is expected to take place in the near future, and it can present a significant challenge for institutions by causing a shortage in talent and expertise at the top levels of leadership. However, as these eventual retirements draw closer, the anticipated leadership gaps also present an opportunity to cultivate and appoint new talented executives. To continue their mission of educating the professionals of tomorrow and providing them with upward social mobility, higher education institutions of the 21st century need leaders at the helm who are exceptional, visionary, and transformational (Bateh & Heyliger, 2014).

Developing and implementing succession plans will provide a seamless transition in leadership from the academic leaders in place to the future appointed leaders of colleges and universities. At the organizational level, the findings of this study can prove to be useful for higher education institutions when developing training and development programs for their future leaders. At the individual level, this study can help a future academic leader identify the leadership behaviors, traits, and capabilities they can cultivate and implement to increase their leadership effectiveness.

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to explore the lived experience and leadership behaviors of senior level academic leaders (in place) and the sensemaking of their leadership effectiveness and their perception of their lived experiences that contributed to their success as leaders. Participants in this study included Provosts, Deans of Academic Affairs (DAA) and Chief Academic Officers (CAO) of four-year public or private colleges and universities from the Northeastern region of the United States.
This chapter begins with a brief overview of the research related to the leadership needs for higher education and provides context and background to the study. The rationale and significance of the study are discussed next, presenting the applications of this study in helping the newly appointed academic leaders in higher education institutions get a better understanding of the influences on their leadership effectiveness. The problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented to focus and ground the study. Finally, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study is introduced and explained.

**Background and Context**

Higher education leaders of the 21st century encounter a completely different set of challenges compared to those encountered by their predecessors in the past century. The challenges presented by the higher education environment in the 21st century include:

(a) higher complexity at the societal level with impact on the individual and organizations due to a higher level of interdependency; (b) increased competition due to the globalization since the performance at the local level is compared with global counterparts; (c) constant innovation required by shifting technology; (d) gaps created by retirements; (e) increased social and civic responsibilities for institutions; (f) a multigenerational student population; and (g) AI implementation at larger scale in more sectors of the economy. As a result, scholars have noted that breakthrough change has become a requirement, and radical organizational reinvention is a necessity (Hacker & Roberts, 2003).

**Retirements Create Significant Gaps and Needs for Succession Planning**

The anticipated retirement of C-level executives in higher education institutions is creating a challenge for higher education since a large percentage of the population of academic leaders is approaching the retirement age. The trend started to emerge nearly a decade ago with a
study conducted by the American Association of the Community Colleges (Campbell, 2006). The study found that the percentage of community colleges professionals eligible for retiring between the years of 2006 and 2010 was on a significant upswing. Data allowed estimating the percentages of key positions to be vacated due to the retiring of high-level, non-faculty professionals (Campbell, 2006). It was estimated that between 2006 and 2010, an institution with an administrative staff between 11-25 percent of the total employees, would have 38 percent of the positions vacated in Academic Affairs, 31 percent of positions in Student Affairs, and 28 percent of positions in Business Affairs (Campbell, 2006). More recent data confirmed the trend, as a report dated 2011 generated by the American Council on Education’s (ACE), listed that almost six in 10 presidents of higher education institutions are over the age of 60 with a tenure in the role averaging seven years (Cook, 2012).

If proper succession planning takes place, the retirement of highly ranked professionals should not generate a void of leadership for their institutions, so it would not have an adverse impact on the future of their respective institutions. Taking into consideration the current context of the higher education environment, filling these vacated roles with exceptional leaders is of paramount importance (Bateh & Heyliger, 2014).

**Exponential Growth of Technology**

Technology developed exponentially in the past two decades. This rapid advancement was characterized by such changes as accessing the internet through dial-up tone to having online access instantly using smartphones. The ease of online access and the widespread usage of technology had an impact on the higher education environment and changed how institutions reach out and engage their audience, students, prospective students, and their families. iGen students are using technology anywhere between 1 hour to 10 hours per day (Seemiller & Grace,
Colleges and universities had to adapt to their students’ population preferred channels of communication as it became more frequent and informal between students and their professors, and college administrators. To ensure that students receive notifications from school, higher education administrators are using various communication channels that did not even exist in the 20th century. These channels include, for example, social media platforms or text messaging, which were once considered too informal for official communication (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

**Multigenerational Student Population**

To meet and exceed the expectations of their multigenerational student population, including members of Generation X, Generation Y (Millenials), and Generation Z (iGen or digital natives), colleges and universities will need to adjust to a different set of educational goals, communication, and learning styles (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Different generations have different motivations, interests, and demographic cultures, and school administrators have to understand and connect with their students to be able to provide them the best assistance and guidance possible and to help them achieve their educational goals (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

**Transformational Changes Require Transformational Leaders**

Hacker and Roberts (2003) emphasized the dire need for transformational changes to be implemented in educational institutions, but they are hampered by the differing reactions of leaders toward this new environment, “Some seize the opportunity for change, while others do not” (p. 19). Future leaders will have to constantly adapt and adjust their leadership style to ensure that their teams and their institutions will remain successful in promoting their educational values and achieving organizational goals.

Higher education is experiencing major changes in the 21st century and unprecedented transformational times require exceptional transformational leaders. Transformational leadership
is defined as a process of establishing a professional relationship between a leader and their followers that generates, for everyone involved in this process, an increased level of dedication to the organization and their moral principles (Northouse, 2016).

Heames and Harvey (2006) analyzed the skills and qualifications of an executive leader to be successful in the 21st century when leading their organization in a hypercompetitive, multi-faceted and multicultural global environment. For example, in the 20th century, colleges and universities operated mainly in the United States and having campuses overseas was rather uncommon. Whereas in the 21st century, many institutions operate in multiple locations worldwide, having teams with a high level of cultural diversity. One of the benefits of experiencing an exponential development of technology in the 21st century was the ability to vary the teaching modality, from face-to-face teaching in classrooms, to online teaching using various virtual platforms, and hybrid teaching combining the two models. Several differences in the organizational environment as applied to higher education institutions are illustrated in Table 1. The differences range from market differences, teaching modalities, and impact of technology.
Table 1

*Differences in Higher Education Environment of the 20th Century and the 21st Century*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>20th Century</th>
<th>21st Century</th>
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<tr>
<td>Domestic market</td>
<td>International market</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stable environment</td>
<td>Shifting environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>On campus teaching</td>
<td>Online, on campus and hybrid teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emerging developing of technology</td>
<td>Exponential developing of technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slow communication</td>
<td>Instant communication</td>
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</table>

Note. Adapted from Heames and Harvey (2006)

Therefore, this study sought to explore the sensemaking of the academic leaders of their leadership experience, such as behaviors, skills, traits, and competencies and illuminate their perception of the elements that had an impact, either positive or negative, on their leadership effectiveness in their role.

**Problem Statement**

The higher education landscape in America is undergoing major transformations due to globalization, modern technology, stricter federal and local regulations, a multigenerational and multicultural workforce, rapidly changing work environments, and the anticipated retirement of academic leaders holding key positions at their institutions (Hacker & Roberts, 2013). A 2011 ACE report cited that 58 percent of the presidents of higher education institutions were over the age of 60 (Cook, 2012). To prevent a gap in leadership and to meet the leadership needs of a new era in higher education, more information is needed to build a diverse pool of qualified, visionary, transformational, and effective leaders to fill these roles (Bateh & Heyliger, 2014).
To prevent the uncertainty caused by change in executive leadership, proper succession planning needs to take place. This scenario presents an opportunity to explore the problem of selecting and developing future leaders. There is a tremendous need to build a new wave of exceptional leaders who will be ready, able, and willing to disregard their personal interests and apply focus to the best interest of all the stakeholders of the organizations they represent (Knights, 2013). For higher education, the list of stakeholders includes students, shareholders, faculty and staff, community, society, and the planet.

Avolio et al. (2009) noted that there is a positive association between the transformational leadership style and leadership effectiveness. Rajah et al. (2011) considered that transformational leaders are able to manage their followers’ emotions in dealing with change during organizational uncertainty. Humphrey (2002) acknowledged the dual role of a transformational leader by managing the task that has to be completed and also influencing and managing the emotions of their followers. Wong and Law (2002) considered that “behavioral complexity is a core element of leader effectiveness” (p. 245). Research confirmed that the emotional intelligence level of a leader is a predictor for anticipating behaviors of professionals in organizational environment (Nordin, 2012). Therefore, as higher education is going through times of rapid change, its future leaders will have to develop a set of skills and traits that will position them as catalysts for change in their organization and helping them manage their followers’ emotions during times of uncertainty.

To determine the organizational effectiveness of the leader’s emotional intelligence and their transformational leadership style, scholars recommend exploring the comparison between various components of these two concepts (Allameh et al., 2015). There has not been extended research conducted to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership
effectiveness, and uncertainty still surrounds the criteria that moderate the effectiveness of a leader (Rosete & Chiarrochi, 2005). Little is known about the transformational change taking place in higher education institutions, especially when a bottom-up approach is implemented and the catalysts of change are the academic leaders involved in driving and implementing the changes (Kezar, 2013). Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2014) stated that there is a gap in studying specifically the leadership style of higher education leaders, and these scholars recommended more research to be conducted for determining the impact of the leadership style practiced by a higher education leader on faculty performance.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative IPA study was to explore the lived experience and leadership behaviors of senior level academic leaders (in place), how they made sense of their professional experiences and leadership effectiveness, and their perception of the experiences that contributed to their success as leaders. Participants in this study included Provosts, Assistant Provosts, Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs, Deans of Academic Affairs (DAA) and Chief Academic Officers (CAO) of four-year public or private colleges and universities from the Northeastern region of the United States.

Transformational leadership is defined as a process of establishing a professional relationship between a leader and their followers that generates, for everyone involved in this process, an increased level of dedication to the organization and their moral principles (Northouse, 2016). Knights & Wall (2013) considered that type of leader to be transformational, a professional who is striving to change themself before changing anything else in their sphere of influence. Knowledge generated by this study is expected to help academic leaders identify...
leadership behaviors, traits, and capabilities they can cultivate and implement to increase their leadership effectiveness in leading their teams and departments.

**Research Question**

This study was designed to explore the sensemaking of the leadership effectiveness of academic executives and their perceptions of the elements that influenced it. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do today’s academic leaders of higher education institutions perceive and make sense of their experience as leaders?
2. What is the perception of academic leaders of leadership effectiveness in higher education?
3. How do executive academic leaders make sense of the factors that influence leadership effectiveness?

To find the answers to these questions, a qualitative method of research was applied with a purposeful sampling with all participants as practitioners in higher education. Eight college or university executive academic leaders, such as Provosts, Deans of Academic Affairs (DAAs), Assistant Provosts, and Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs were interviewed from either public or private, four-year institutions located in the Northeastern region of the United States.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework applied when conducting this research was the full-range leadership theory generated by Bass and Avolio (1994), conjoined with the correlational model created by Pinos et al. (2006). This framework explains the correlation between emotional intelligence and several leadership behaviors, including a brief description of their perceived effectiveness.
There is a plethora of definitions and interpretations provided by scholars for leadership. Nazim and Mahmood (2016) provided a basic description of a leader, as an individual with the ability to influence others, and they stated that leadership style is defined by the leader’s behavior toward his followers. Leadership is a complex process involving a group of professionals pursuing a common organizational goal (Nazim & Mahmood, 2016). Yukl (1999) believed that one of the main functions of leadership is to identify ways for the organization to adapt and thrive in its environment. One of the main roles of leaders is to mold the convictions of their followers, and this can be achieved through interactions between the leader and followers in which emotions, moral values, and convictions are exchanged (Miller & Sardais, 2011).

For the past several decades, scholars have analyzed the impact of leadership style and behaviors on the culture of an organization, on the loyalty and job satisfaction of their employees, and on their level of performance and effectiveness. Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2014) conducted a study showing that higher education leaders who are implementing various leadership styles can positively influence the job satisfaction of their followers, for higher education, that would be faculty members. The approach was confirmed by the findings of the study conducted by Bateh and Heyliger (2014) who concluded that higher education leaders “represent a crucial element of job satisfaction” (p. 45) and have a direct impact on the turnover of the faculty body.

The next section will discuss the full-range leadership theory (FRLT) designed by Bass and Avolio (1994), the leadership styles and the components representing the leadership behaviors included in this theory, with an emphasis on transformational leadership. Further, the influence of emotional intelligence on the transformational leadership components and leadership effectiveness, based on the model generated by Pinos et al. (2006) are described.
Full-Range Leadership Theory

In 1978, Burns published “his seminal work introducing the concepts of transformational and transactional leadership” (Bass, 1999, p. 9). Several years later, in 1994, Bass and Avolio launched the full-range leadership theory that includes three styles of leadership: transactional, transformational, and non-transactional. These scholars recognized that complex leaders would exhibit, at various points in time, all of these leadership styles to a certain degree depending on the organizational circumstances. Bateh and Heyliger (2014) supported this approach considering that the “hallmark of an effective leader” (p. 37) is their ability to implement multiple leadership styles, such as the transactional or task-oriented styles or transformational or relationship-oriented leadership styles, according to the situation’s demands. The full-range leadership theory launched by Bass and Avolio (1994) includes three leadership styles, non-transactional, transactional, and transformational.

Non-transactional (laissez-faire) leadership. Laissez-faire or non-transactional leadership describes instances when leaders are not present at the time when they are expected to act, they are intentionally avoiding their leadership responsibilities, fail on the assistance requests submitted by their followers, and do not express their position and views on various issues (Bass, 1997). Kelloway et al. (2012) considered that this leadership style is characterized by the “absence of transactions” (p. 39) between the leader and their followers. The non-transactional leadership is still considered an active leadership style because it is the leader’s intentional decision to avoid his involvement in leading their followers (Antonakis et al., 2003).

Transactional leadership. Bass (1997) posited that the transactional leadership concept is based on leaders using their power to ensure that followers are delivering on their part of the transaction, such that organizational or team goals are met. The reinforcement provided by the
leader “can be materialistic or symbolic, immediate or delayed, partial or whole, implicit or explicit” (Bass, 1997, p. 132). This leadership style consists of the leader interacting with their followers based on the level of the performance they deliver (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transactional leadership has three components:

(a) contingent reward (CR) takes place when a leader is setting clear expectations for goals and rewards associated with the expectations being met by their followers; they ensure resources are available, provide assistance when needed and offer praise for successful performance delivered by the followers;

(b) active management by exception (MBE-A) consists of leaders monitoring the performance of their followers and taking corrective action when standards are not met, preventing mistakes by enforcing the rules;

(c) passive management by exception (MBE-P) takes place when the leader doesn’t get involved until major problems occur and they wait for taking corrective action until mistakes are brought to their attention. (Bass, 1997, p. 134)

The leader practicing the active management by exception (MBE-A) leadership style has an active monitoring role preventing performance deviations or mistakes and correcting the course of action in due time. The leader implementing a passive management by exception (MBE-P) leadership style acts only after the mistakes occurred, takes more of a passive role and they implement corrective action to rectify the outcomes and improve performance of the team (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Bass (1999) explained the major difference between the transactional and transformational leadership styles, stating that transactional leadership emphasizes how a team member can contribute to the success of their organization, whereas the transformative
leadership model emphasizes what the organization can do for their employees. Even though the exchange between the leader and their followers starts at the transactional level, for the leadership to be effective, the relationship established between a leader and their followers has to evolve to a transformational level (Bass, 1997). Bass stated that “the best of leaders are both transactional and transformational” (p. 132). The transactional and transformational leadership styles do not counteract each other, on the contrary, “transformational leadership tends to add to the effects of transactional leadership” (Bass, 1997, p. 137). One main difference between these two types of leaders is that “the transactional leader works within the constraints of the organization; the transformational leader changes the organization” (p. 132). The concept was validated by Rosete and Chiarrochi (2005) who stated that transformational leaders are moving the organization forward, whereas the transactional leaders are “maintaining the status-quo” of an organization (p. 390).

**Transformational leadership.** Transactional leadership style involves an exchange between the leader and their followers, whereas the transformational leaders achieve superior results by implementing one or more of the components listed below (Bass & Avolio, 1994):

- Idealized influence (II) – the transformational leader is an inspiration for their followers; they behave as role models, and as a result, they are respected, trusted and admired by their followers. The leader takes into consideration the needs of their followers that take priority over their personal needs, and they have a high level of standards for their work ethics.

- Inspirational motivation (IM) – followers are motivated by their leader who provides meaning to their work; a transformational leader shares their vision of a positive organizational future and sets high expectations that the followers are committed to meet.
• Intellectual stimulation (IS) – the transformational leader encourages their followers to solve old challenges by taking new approaches; innovative and creative efforts are encouraged, and mistakes are not criticized in public.

• Individual consideration (IC) – followers receive support from their leader for developing their careers, and a transformational leader acts as a coach or mentor, and they are aware of each follower’s career aspirations and encourage them; the leader is an excellent listener, and they delegate tasks to followers with the purpose of developing their skills and monitor the task’s completion to determine if more support or guidance has to be provided to ensure its completion.

Ghadi et al., (2013) observed that transformational leadership takes a dominant role in the literature of contemporary leadership styles. Bass and Avolio (1994) stated that transformational leadership takes place when the leaders: (a) fuel interest in their followers and as a result they perceive their work from a different perspective; (b) increase the level of awareness on the mission of the organization; (c) motivate employees to pursue a common goal, that might be beyond their personal interests; and (d) develop their followers to reaching greater heights of their careers closer to their potential. A transformational leader sets ambitious and challenging goals, and in most instances, they achieve higher levels of performance from their followers.

Northouse (2016) considered that transformational leadership involves displaying emotions, sharing principles, charisma, influence, setting and sharing visions and goals, and changing and transforming all parties involved in this process, both leaders and followers alike. Transformational leadership is usually assessed using the 20 items scale developed by Bass and Avolio, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008). The MLQ usually measures the leader’s behavior as perceived by their followers (Batch & Heyliger, 2014).
The implementation of MLQ5X was recommended by Avolio and Bass (2004) for the organizational assessment, development, and feedback for both individual professionals and groups.

Yang and Zhu (2016) noted that for the past several years, many companies facing various challenges in their environment turned to appointing leaders exhibiting a charismatic behavior to improve the innovation and the outcomes for their companies. A transformational leader is, in essence, charismatic and inspirational, and when they share their vision, they are “intellectually and emotionally stimulating” their followers (Higgs & Rowland, 2002, p. 69). Transformational leadership is most commonly encountered during situations of crisis when major changes take place in the organization, and team members are confused and need direction on the steps they need to take (Humphrey, 2002).

**Correlation Between Emotional Intelligence, Transformational Leadership, and Leadership Effectiveness**

Scholars claim that more research is needed to further explore the role that emotional intelligence of a leader plays in enhancing various components of transformational leadership, and influencing their leadership effectiveness (Allameh et al., 2015; Rosete & Chiarrocchi, 2005). This study adopted the full-range leadership theory (FRLT) developed by Bass and Avolio (1994), with an emphasis on the transformational leadership (TFL) and its four components, and also adopted the conceptual model of emotional intelligence and workplace effectiveness created by Pinos et al. (2006). Thus, a conceptual framework was developed for this study. Illustrated in Figure 1 is the theoretical lens used in the study, showing the influence of emotional intelligence on the four components of the transformational leadership style and the leadership effectiveness.
Pinos et al. (2006) studied the mediator role played by transformational leadership style, and they developed a conceptual model of emotional intelligence and individual performance (workplace effectiveness). Their research determined an alignment between the components and elements that define the emotional intelligence of a leader and the four components of transformational leadership. The construct led to an investigation of the perception of emotional intelligence and leadership style, specifically transformational leadership style, as influencing the lived experiences of the academic executives and their leadership effectiveness.
Emotional intelligence. One additional challenge that leaders of the 21st century are facing is managing their own and their followers’ emotions in the organizational environment. For a long time, emotions were disregarded in the interactions taking place in the workplace, where professionals were encouraged to use only logic and rationality. Now the employee’s emotions are “perceived to be central to experiences at work and are studied as relevant predictors to performance” (Rajah et al., 2011, p. 1107). Studies show that when emotions are channeled accordingly in the organizational environment, they can solidify trust, build loyalty and commitment among employees, and drive “many of the greatest productivity gains, innovations and accomplishments of individuals, teams and organizations.” (Cooper, 1997, p. 31). Bass (1999) stated that “leadership is as much emotional and subjective as rational and objective in effect” (p. 18).

Emotional intelligence is a component of the human intelligence different from abstract intelligence. One basic definition of emotional intelligence is the ability to “reason about emotions” (Mayer et al., 2008, p. 509). Mayer et al. viewed emotional intelligence as an ability to understand one’s own and others’ emotions and to apply emotions and the emotional intellect to enrich the reasoning process.

To inform this study, the emotional intelligence model launched by Goleman in 1995, and refined in 2001, is introduced next. As listed in Table 2, this model grouped 20 emotional intelligence competencies in four clusters:

(a) self-awareness (being aware of one’s emotions);

(b) self-management (inhibit own negative emotions);

(c) social awareness (recognize others’ emotions, especially the negative ones);
(d) relationship management (manage other’s emotions), describing the potential of a professional to master the skills related to these four areas (Goleman, 2001).

Table 2

*Emotional Intelligence Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Emotional self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accurate self-assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Management</td>
<td>Emotional self-control</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consciousness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-Awareness</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship-management</td>
<td>Developing others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visionary leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catalyzing change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teamwork and collaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Goleman’s (2001) model of emotional intelligence (p. 28)

Research demonstrates that emotional intelligence is an important factor for a leader’s success (Carmeli, 2003). One of the competencies listed in Goleman’s (2001) emotional intelligence model, *catalyzing change*, gained more attention, especially during the transition stages in an organization. When the leader is competent in catalyzing change in an organization, they generate a better response from their followers who will deliver a better performance and a higher level of efforts in implementing that change (Goleman, 2001).
Dulewicz and Higgs (2004) stated that there is a “strong consensus” that an individual can develop their emotional intelligence skills, since its capabilities are malleable, and “workplace experiences have a significant impact on this shaping process “ (p. 96). The training techniques could include “lectures, discussions, videos, exercises, dialogue, role play, diaries and one-to-one feedback” (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2004, p. 101). Leimbach & Maringka (2010) recommended developing the emotional intelligence abilities through “training and team-learning intervention” (p. 140).

**Leadership effectiveness.** Waldman et al. (2011) defined leadership effectiveness as the ability of an individual to regulate their own emotions, such as sharing a positive, optimistic vision for the future of the organization, while diminishing their negative emotions like anxiety, in order to avoid demotivating their team members. Nazim and Mahmood (2016) stated that leadership performance is evaluated from two angles, the leadership efficiency that relates to the outcomes generated from inputs and the leadership effectiveness that evaluates the actual outcomes versus set goals. Research showed that leadership effectiveness includes two forms of variables: attitudinal such as “job satisfaction and organizational commitment”; and behavioral such as “job performance and organizational citizenship behavior” (Yang & Zhou, 2016, p.161). Castro et al. (2008) confirmed the two types of variables for leadership effectiveness, and these scholars posited that a transformational leadership style has “a significant influence on the work attitudes and behaviors of followers” (p. 1842).

For more than 25 years, transformational leadership became one of the most common approaches used to better understand the leadership effectiveness of a leader (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). Rosete and Chiarrochi (2005) supported the statement that the transformational leadership style is more effective than the transactional leadership style. Alonderiene and Majauskaite
(2014) claimed that when the leadership style is matched appropriately to the context of a situation, leadership effectiveness will increase. Bass (1999) considered that for a leader to become more effective in a constantly changing environment, they should strive to become “more transformational and less transactional” (p. 9).

Braun et al. (2013) stated that even though transformational leadership style is one of the most studied leadership concepts, research conducted to determine the multilevel effect of this leadership style on individuals and teams “is still scarce” (p. 270). These scholars claimed that the academic environment as a context for transformational leadership was “understudied” (Braun et al., 2013, p. 271).

**Critics of the Theory**

Antonakis et al. (2003) questioned the accuracy of the evaluations of a leader’s style using the questionnaire created by Bass and Avolio (1995), the MLQ (Form 5X), since they considered that the context in which these evaluations are completed can have an impact on the overall assessment. Contextual factors, such as organizational environment, culture, demographics of the team can impact the evaluation outcomes for non-homogenous samples (Antonakis et al., 2003). For example, if the leader’s behavior is observed, the context of the organizational environment, an emergency room versus a business, would require different approaches from a leader when they have to take corrective measures to solve the mistakes made by their team members since the consequences of the mistakes carry a different weight (Antonakis et al., 2003). After conducting further research, these scholars reached the conclusion that the components of the full-range leadership theory generated by Bass and Avolio, are “fully-invariable within homogenous contexts” (p. 261).
Rafferty and Griffin (2004) recognized the popularity of the FRLT generated by Bass and Avolio; however, they questioned the identification and description of the components of the transformational leadership model, especially the distinctions between II and IM. These researchers considered that it can be challenging to clearly identify the leader’s behaviors specific to the leadership models listed in the theory (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). Another criticism was that this leadership theory does not include all possible leadership constructs, such as, for example, “strategic leadership” (Antonakis et al., 2003, p. 285). Oversimplifying the components of a leadership theory can have a negative impact on the development of new leaders, who might be seeking feedback on a specific leadership style to fully develop their leadership skills (Antonakis et al., 2003). However, scholars recognized the intention of Bass and Avolio to study a particular leadership style in its fullness and for the entire spectrum, from the completely avoidant style to the highly inspirational leader (Antonakis et al., 2003). Antonakis et al. made the recommendation to add four more leadership styles to this theory and include all nine components of the FRLT.

Bratton et al. (2011) acknowledged that for several years it was theorized that emotional intelligence contributes to leadership effectiveness, especially to the transformational leadership style. However, they concluded that earlier experiential studies conducted did not demonstrate this correlation. To prove this connection indeed takes place, the researchers recommended conducting future research that explores the “relationship between emotional intelligence and self-awareness of leadership effectiveness” (Bratton et al., 2011, p. 131).

**Rationale for the Theoretical Framework**

This research intended to explore the lived experiences of academic leaders and their perception of the influences on their effectiveness as leaders in a higher education institution.
Therefore, the FRLT generated by Bass and Avolio (1994) and the correlational model created by Pinos et al. (2006) were considered appropriate for this study’s foundation. The emotional intelligence model developed by Goleman (2001) informed the study. Antonakis et al. (2003) considered that using the FRLT and its components will allow future research to explore how various combinations of leadership styles can have an impact on increasing the leadership effectiveness. Also, it can prove to be more beneficial to evaluate and provide feedback to future leaders using the specific components of the FRLT instead of using a general leadership style, and it will also allow for a more targeted leadership development program to develop their leadership potential (Antonakis et al., 2003). Using basic leadership models with fewer components can have a negative impact on future research and the development of focused programs for leadership training and development, leaving unexplored important leadership styles, such as “strategic leadership” (Antonakis et al., 2003, p. 286).

Castro et al. (2008) noted the existence of a positive relationship between transformational leadership and leadership effectiveness. Cooper (1997) stated that a leader could enhance their leadership effectiveness by acknowledging their own and their followers’ emotions. Pinos et al. (2006) stated that leaders with a high level of emotional intelligence contribute to maintaining the organization’s competitive advantage by increasing their team’s performance, encouraging innovation in the workplace, using the time and resources effectively, motivating the workforce and promoting teamwork and restoring trust among the team members.

**Applying Theory to this Study**

Table 3 reflects the theoretical framework applied for conducting this study. This table lists four clusters of the Goleman’s (2001) emotional intelligence model, four transformational leadership components included in the full-range leadership theory FRLT (Bass & Avolio,
1994), and the leadership effectiveness of a leader in influencing the four dimensions of their followers’ behaviors and attitudes (Yang & Zhu, 2016). The conceptual framework used for this study describes how the correlation between specific components of the emotional intelligence and transformational leadership (Pinos et al., 2006) is perceived as having an influence on the leadership effectiveness.

Table 3

*Theoretical Framework Applied for this Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Intelligence</th>
<th>Transformational Leadership</th>
<th>Leadership Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>Idealized influence</td>
<td>Work performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-management</td>
<td>Individualized consideration</td>
<td>Organizational commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Idealized influence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
<td>Individualized consideration</td>
<td>Organizational citizenship behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship management</td>
<td>Intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inspirational motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Goleman’s (2001) emotional intelligence model, FRLT (Bass & Avolio, 1994), and leadership effectiveness as described by Yang and Zhu (2016).

**Self-awareness: Idealized influence – Work performance.** Transformational leaders can inspire their followers to deliver additional effort by motivating them and exhibiting confidence in their ability to deliver superior performance (Yang & Zhu, 2016). Pinos et al. (2006) stated that transformational leaders help their followers align their goals with organizational goals, and the organizational benefit is that their performance level will be above expectations. Transformational leaders give credit and encourage their followers to receive the credit and recognition for their superior performance, and that helps them becoming effective motivators for their followers (Pinos et al., 2006).
**Self-management: Individual consideration and idealized influence - Organizational commitment.** Pinos et al. (2006) affirmed that a transformational leader can control their emotions better by being able to build a high level of trust with their followers, and as a result, employees display a higher level of organizational commitment, especially during the organizational change.

**Social awareness: Individualized consideration - Organizational citizenship behavior.** Applying their social-awareness traits, transformational leaders are able to properly evaluate a situation, and their “followers’ level of comprehension” of it (Pinos et al., 2006, p. 69). Yang and Zhu (2016) considered that transformational leaders are able to increase their team’s cohesion, by enhancing collaboration between members from the same team or from different departments, thus increasing organizational “cross-border communication” (p. 160).

**Relationship management: Intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation - job satisfaction.** Pinos et al. (2006) noted that setting specific goals and communicating them clearly to the team have a positive impact on the job satisfaction of the employees. Transformational leaders are encouraging innovation, they provide support for development of their followers, strive to generate synergy in their teams, and that changes in a positive direction the followers’ attitude toward their job (Pinos et al., 2006). Yang and Zhu (2016) claimed that leaders’ behavior can have a positive influence on their followers’ work attitude by increasing their enthusiasm. Transformational leaders help their team members understand the impact of their work in the organization and that motivates employees and increases their job satisfaction (Yang & Zhu, 2016).
Definitions

To ensure the concepts applied in this study can be followed and their meaning is understood correctly by the reader, the definitions of the key terminology used in this doctoral thesis are provided below.

**C-level executive.** Chief Officers of the institution, such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Academic Officer (CAO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Operations Officer (COO), who are setting the direction of their organization on the long term (Bruce & Muhlberg, 2014).

**Emotional intelligence.** A component of human intelligence, as a complex process interconnecting one individual’s feeling and thinking (Chopra & Kanji, 2010).

**Leadership.** “Leadership occurs when someone imparts his or her convictions to another.” (Miller & Sardais, 2011, p. 176). “Leadership becomes a function of responding to the needs of others and helping them to help themselves” (Goll, 1996, p. 15). A leader is influencing his/her followers to achieve organizational goals (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2014). Leadership is a complex process involving a group of professionals pursuing a common organizational goal (Nazim & Mahmood, 2016).

**Leadership effectiveness.** The demonstrated ability of a leader to accomplish their set goals (“What”), by building relationships with followers, peers and direct and indirect managers (“How”), for increasing the organizational effectiveness (“Why”) (Antonakis et al., 2003; Rosete & Chiarocchi, 2005).

**Leadership acumen.** The demonstrated proficiency in leading a team or organization (Kaplan, 2006).
**Transformational leadership.** “Leader behaviors that transform and inspire followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest for the good of the organization” (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009, p. 423).

**Centralized leadership.** The leader role is fulfilled by one member of the group for the majority of the time (Chatwani, 2017).

**Distributed leadership.** Leadership belongs to the group, the collective efforts are greater than the individual contributions of the team members (Bolden et al., 2009).

**Shared (collaborative) leadership.** The leader and their team members collaborate in the leading and the decision making process (Kramer & Crespy, 2011).

**Authentic leadership.** One of the most recently identified leadership styles is perceived from an intrapersonal perspective focusing only on the leader and interpersonal focusing on the relationships between the leader and their followers (Northouse, 2016).

**Assumptions**

Research is a personal journey, presenting its unique challenges and excitement (Creswell, 2015). For conducting this study, qualitative research methodology was considered to match the constructivist worldview of the investigator who believed that participants seek to understand “the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). The investigator recognized that their interpretation of the participants’ sensemaking would be shaped by their background, and as a result focused on listening to the answers the participants provided to the open-ended questions asked during the interviews, to be able to understand their interactions with other individuals in the workplace (Creswell, 2009). The expectation is that this study’s findings will help by adding to, or advancing the current knowledge and generate “improvements for practice” since “educators strive for continual improvement” (Creswell, 2015, p. 4).
The IPA methodology was considered to fit best this type of research since IPA has a sharp focus on the individual’s experience and their understanding of own experiences (Smith, 2011). During the interviews, the participants were asked to share from their experiences as leaders of the Academic Affairs at their colleges or universities and their sensemaking of the experiences. The assumption was that the in-depth interpretation of these academic executives’ making sense of their professional experiences and the influences on their leadership effectiveness, can provide rich data generating findings that inform the research question on influences on leadership effectiveness in higher education.

Another assumption was that the prior experience as a higher education administrator would allow the investigator to connect easier and to resonate with the participants’ sharing, as she was well-positioned to make sense and interpret their sensemaking. Especially during the interview process, the investigator’s thorough understanding of the participants’ role and responsibilities, helped with asking pertinent follow-up and probing questions, when participants shared their understanding of the complex phenomenon of leadership and the factors that they perceived had influenced their leadership effectiveness (Reiners, 2012). The assumption was that these professionals experiences and their sensemaking are going to be illuminating the needs of future leaders as they are preparing to become the exceptional leaders in the new landscape of higher education.

Due to the condition that the participants are currently in their roles in times of transformation, striving to mitigate the challenges they encounter to the best of their abilities, the assumption is that this would validate their knowledge as reliable and credible. As per the IPA guidelines, the sample of participants was purposefully homogeneous, and that leads to the assumption that the conclusions drawn from the in-depth data analysis are related to the research
question, since the “research problem has relevance and personal significance” for the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 365).

Scope and Delimitations

The scope and delimitations of this study were the following: a) the sample used for this study was small consisting of eight academic executives; b) the participants had at least eight years of experience in an executive leadership role in academe; c) they were currently in the role at a four-year college or university, public or private; and d) their organization was based in the Northeastern region of the United States. These criteria were set to ensure a small sample that allows for a deep analysis of their sensemaking and to avoid developing too many themes for this study (Smith, 2011). The sample was homogeneous so the experiences of the participants were generated from similar professional backgrounds, as they were fulfilling similar responsibilities in their roles. Their tenure of a minimum eight years in an executive role allowed them to gain a thorough understanding of the role and a high level of institutional knowledge. They were based in the same geographical region so similar constraints and regulations applied to their roles.

Limitations

There were several limitations impacting the findings of this study: a) as per qualitative research guidelines, the analysis of the data was inductive; therefore they cannot be generalized since they were reported “beginning with the details and working up to a general picture” (Creswell, 2015, p. 262); b) the methodology used for conducting this study was IPA and that required interviewing a small sample of participants. As a result, it cannot be considered a representative sample (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012); and c) the sample was homogeneous as per IPA requirements, consisting of eight academic executives at four-year colleges and universities based in the Northeastern region of US who were selected for this study and that prevented
“random sampling” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 365). These limitations are addressed in greater detail in the last chapter of this study.

**Significance**

The importance of this study is demonstrated by the notion that American colleges and universities have a tremendous need for bold, exceptional, visionary leaders to help their institutions in continuing their mission of educating the workforce of the 21st century (Bateh & Heyliger, 2014). These emerging and future leaders will need to find innovative paths for navigating tumultuous times, so their institutions will thrive in a highly competitive environment of higher education and continue to be the engine for the upward social mobility of the next generations. Higher education is considered “the quiet but decisive catalyst in the modern society, the factor essential to its effective functioning and well-being” (Crow & Dabars, 2015, p. 17). Crow and Dabars emphasized the critical role of higher education in the welfare of a nation, by educating students and future professionals and providing invaluable contributions for the economic growth and sustainable progress of the society. Cole (2010) underlined the important role of higher education in contributing to the economic system of a nation. A better educated citizen can bring valuable contributions to society, and, therefore, investing in educating future professionals is an investment in the welfare of a nation (Cole, 2010). Knowledge is considered the source of “social and economic advancement. We require an increasing proportion of our young people to be trained, even beyond their undergraduate education” (Cole, 2010, p. 202).

“Knowledge has become the prime mover” (Crow & Dabars, 2015, p. 21) for a nation, and its future trajectory is not determined anymore by predetermined factors, such as population, natural resources, climate and location. Crow and Dabars considered that “unlike coal, knowledge is a renewable resource“ (p. 22), and it is autocatalytic, in the sense that it keeps
increasing, even when it is distributed. The unrelenting pressures of today’s higher education environment have generated an expectation for a high level of leadership effectiveness delivered by leaders in their roles. As described by Fullan (1998) turbulent times for leaders in education “prompt an understandable tendency to want to know what to do” (p. 2). To adjust to their constantly changing environment, colleges and universities are undergoing organizational restructurings, a process that has become the norm rather than the exception. However, changing course in the workplace and pursuing new directions require leaders with new visions, who are willing and able to implement new paradigms in their organization. Fullan (1998) considered that changing the way professionals work together is a process of reculturing the organization, which has a bigger impact in teaching and learning at the organizational level.

This study is important because it can expand research on the perceived leadership effectiveness of academic leaders in higher education institutions. Mahdinezhad et al. (2013) reasoned that a department leader in a higher education institution holds an important role in the educational accomplishments of the institution and in the performance level of their departments as it impacts the reputation of the institution. For institutions to achieve their set goals, employees will have to deliver a certain level of performance that is evaluated from various angles, such as the research conducted, the level of the academic teaching, educational initiatives and programs offered to students, students’ academic performance, and institutional effectiveness (Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). Christensen and Eyring (2011) emphasized the role of the higher education leaders in promoting and implementing strategies to increase productivity with the ultimate goal to improve the outcomes of teaching and learning, as “essential in strengthening the nation and positioning it to remain competitive in an increasingly global marketplace” (p. iii). The society benefits when higher education institutions add highly skilled
graduates to the workforce every year, also when those educated professionals possess valuable intangibles, such as good citizenship skills (Christensen & Eyring 2011).

The outcomes of this study can have multiple applications to higher education practice:

- At the individual level, the study outcomes may inform newly appointed higher education leaders to become more intentional in increasing their leadership effectiveness;
- At the organizational level, it can prove the benefits of establishing a standard practice to provide training to newly appointed leaders to increase their leadership effectiveness, as part of their onboarding process;
- At the society level, the contribution of this study supports higher education institutions fulfill their mission of preparing a highly educated workforce, by increasing awareness of the importance of leadership effectiveness and the factors that influence it.

The findings of this study can help higher education C-level executives comprehend better the influences on their leadership effectiveness. These findings may motivate them to make an intentional and conscious effort to become the leaders their teams need to successfully navigate through these times of profound change in higher education. Knights and Wall (2013) stated that until recently, leadership development was focused on how leaders can implement changes in organizations. Now, more than ever, there is a need to focus on how leaders can change themselves to become more effective and to be able to keep up with the faster-changing environment in which their institutions operate (Knights & Wall, 2013). Implementing a highly effective leadership style will help the newly appointed academic leaders to become the exceptional, visionary executives needed for tackling the unprecedented challenges encountered by institutions of higher education in the current environment.
Summary

Considering the multitude of changes that occur currently in the higher education environment and the scale of these changes now and in the future, it is of utmost importance for leaders at the helm to deliver effective leadership and to help their institutions thrive in the new organizational environment. With a high percentage of the C-level executives expected to retire in the near future, there is a dire need to select and develop effective future leaders able to continue the legacy of current leaders. To prevent a gap in leadership and ensure the continuity of institutional mission and values, the literature reveals that higher education institutions should focus on developing succession plans. By identifying and selecting their future leaders and providing appropriate training and development opportunities, higher education institutions can benefit from the research findings around the roles of emotional intelligence and leadership styles on influencing leadership effectiveness. The main purpose of this study was to understand how current academic executives made sense of their leadership effectiveness, and their perceptions of what influenced it. The theoretical framework used for this research is the full range leadership theory developed by Bass and Avolio (1994) with an emphasis on transformational leadership (TFL) style, conjoined with the correlational model of emotional intelligence and workplace effectiveness, designed by Pinos et al. (2006). The combination of these theoretical lenses facilitated the interpretation of the data collected during the research in light of the sensemaking of the leadership effectiveness in academia.

The next chapter, Chapter Two, includes a review of the existent bodies of literature on human and emotional intelligence, leadership effectiveness, and different types of leadership styles practiced by C-level executives in public and private colleges and universities. A section
of this literature review will include a review of studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership and their influence on leadership effectiveness.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Reforming higher education is a topic that has been studied for decades. This topic resurfaced with more urgency in the past two decades due to unprecedented challenges of the 21st century. The problem addressed in this study was the potential gap in leadership caused by the imminent wave of retirement of executives in academia and the deficiency encountered by higher education institutions in identifying talented, capable leaders to implement system changes since “effective and systematic approaches to identifying and developing potential leaders is neglected” (Fullan & Scott, 2009, p. 39). To avoid a leadership vacuum, higher education institutions will have to develop succession plans by selecting, training, and developing effective transformational leaders to fill the vacated roles as educational institutions strive to meet the demands of a rapidly changing landscape and future transformation. The research purpose was to understand how academic executives made sense of their professional experience and leadership effectiveness.

To study the influence of various elements of leadership effectiveness of academic executives, past studies with similar topics of research were reviewed. The literature addresses various elements that have an influence on leadership effectiveness. Two common themes of the scholarly literature were emotional intelligence and leadership style, with an emphasis on transformational leadership. These themes were explored from an empirical view. The review progressed and discussed specifically the influence of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership. To position the study within the existing body of knowledge, the review addressed how prior studies connected emotional intelligence and transformational leadership with leadership effectiveness.
Literature Search Strategy

The literature review was focused primarily on the challenges encountered by colleges and universities in the 21st century and the imperative of transforming and reforming higher education. Transformational leaders are needed during times of change; therefore, the literature review shifted toward identifying the criteria leaders have to meet to be highly effective in their role. The databases used mainly were Pro-Quest, ERIC, EBSCOhost, Emerald, ILLiad, EBook Collection, JSTOR, Elsevier, and Taylor and Francis Online. When reviewing the literature, there were several foci implemented during the search. For example, the environment of higher education in the 21st century, the changes and challenges generated by the environment, the leadership style implemented specifically in higher education, its impact on faculty performance, the components of emotional intelligence and their influence on the leadership style, especially on the transformational leadership components, and the impact transformational leadership has on leadership effectiveness. These literature threads, together with the sensemaking of the lived experiences of the academic executives, provided the conceptual framework for determining the skills and traits leaders of higher education have to implement to be highly effective in their roles, was the focus of the current study.

Key Themes Emerging from the Literature Review

The literature review included an analysis of the following existent bodies of literature: higher education in the 21st century; educational leaders of the future; emotionally intelligent leadership; and leadership effectiveness in academia. This review explains how this study could fill a gap in the current literature and add to the current body of knowledge on the influences on the leadership effectiveness of the higher education academic executives.
Higher Education in the 21st Century

For the past decade, the higher education environment has been rapidly and constantly shifting, and many institutions are facing tremendous challenges in continuing their mission of educating future professionals. Higher education institutions are facing mounting pressure for implementing changes, and to keep up with their shifting environment, these organizations have to implement change from within, define a focus on the turnaround, and identify the leadership they need to complete the transformation (Fullan & Scott, 2009).

Gonaim (2016) stated that for higher education institutions to develop, they are under pressure to reform and to have effective leaders at the helm to implement the needed changes. These institutions are in need of transformational leaders who will be willing, able, and prepared to address and resolve the challenges encountered by their institutions and to set a new course for stabilizing their future and improving their effectiveness in educating our nations’ future professionals (Gonaim, 2016). Gee (2009) noted that higher education institutions have a rich tradition and a wonderful history. However, to continue to deliver on their mission to educate tomorrow’s workforce, their past cannot serve as a compass for their future trajectory. The current environment of higher education brought in new challenges for many organizations, yet, the same challenges can also provide outstanding opportunities for innovation and enhancing collaborations among various departments of the institutions. Challenging times do not allow for any delays or sluggish implementation of the needed measures to move the institution forward. On the contrary, they trigger swift action on the part of the higher education institutions so they could to re-position themselves in their new environment of the 21st century.

Reforming higher education – An imperative. Some of the new demands currently encountered by the higher education institutions are generated in part by a changing environment
including: 1) a different type of student population is coming through the doors of higher education institutions now: iGen students, born between 1995 to 2012, are technology-driven and are the most ethnically diverse generation in history (Seemiller & Grace, 2016); and seasoned students who are more career driven; 2) increased competition; 3) a higher level of accountability; 4) operating in a global context; 5) reduced financial resources in the form of funding (Fullan & Scott, 2009). Colleges have to identify the challenges they encounter in their new environment, and to thrive, and in some dire cases, to survive, they will need to define a new operational model to adapt to their environmental demands (Marcy, 2017). Leaders of higher education institutions have to find a balance of supporting a culture of implementing a business-oriented leadership style, including increased accountability and a “market-oriented and student-centered,” at the same time conserving the institution’s traditions and academic “mission, focus and values” (Segal & Freedman, 2007, as cited in Fullan & Scott, 2009, p. 2).

Higher education institutions are “well placed to help lead the future,” and they “can, must and should model productive change capable cultures” (Fullan & Scott, 2009, p. xii). Gagliardi et al. (2017) considered this a new era for higher education with an opportunity for implementing innovation and transformational changes focused on student outcomes. The new financial conditions experienced by colleges and universities in the US are prompting change initiatives as financial support for public higher education institutions is diminished, there is a wider affordability gap, and the necessity of increasing the resources generating needed support to the incoming new students make it more challenging and expensive to graduate more students (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Gourley (2007), as cited in Fullan and Scott (2009), described the changes in the higher education environment as a “seismic shift,” and strategies to cope with these changes and
challenges include taking advantage of the unparalleled opportunities provided by a “global technology-fueled society” (Fullan & Scott, 2009, p. 2). Abdullah et al. (2008) stated that the changes and the speed at which they occur are shaping the nature of the “schools’ external environments” (p. 648). There are numerous efforts and various stakeholders, such as federal and local agencies, industry advisors, and foundations that continue to invest in maintaining the health and vitality of the higher education system (Kezar, 2013). Begley (2006) noted that organizations are considered “social constructions” (p. 571) that were impacted in the past few years by the phenomena of “corporatization of education” (p. 572). Bolden et al. (2009) noted that with market changes and increased scrutiny and pressure from governmental agencies, educational institutions switched their approach to management from an academic perspective to more of a corporate or “entrepreneurial” model (p. 263). Christensen and Eyring (2011) drew attention to a side effect of implementing businesslike or entrepreneurial models in higher education. To attract, retain, and ensure the satisfaction of their students, colleges, and universities consider their students as “mere customers” (p. 7). The approach can lead to students getting a sense of entitlement to upgraded and expensive to maintain facilities, having access to nonacademic functions such as athletic teams, cafeterias, and food services (Christensen & Eyring, 2011).

Christensen and Eyring (2011) considered that while the current higher education crisis is real, it is mainly a result of the inertia displayed by many institutions that would rather honor their tradition by keeping old practices alive to the point of jeopardizing their futures. To survive in the new environment, higher education institutions of the 21st century have to implement change faster and more profound than in the late 19th, and early 20th centuries when their models were unchallenged, and, therefore, they remained largely intact (Christensen & Eyring, 2011).
To find their niche and survive in the new environment, higher education institutions need to add value to what worked for them in the past, build on what they have always done well, yet they will have to part with their old traditional systems (Christensen & Eyring, 2011).

Fullan and Scott (2009) considered that higher education institutions are resistant to implementing change, and furthermore their leaders are facing an “arcane system and a change-resistant culture” (p. 39) as they try to implement necessary changes in their institutions. Mader et al. (2013) stated that higher education institutions invest a lot of time and attention in addressing the need to change instead of making sure the change actually is sustainable and implemented in a positive fashion, with a high level of efficiency. To ensure that a changing agenda is implemented effectively, higher education institutions have to take a transformative role when addressing the various challenges their environment presents on short or long term, like, for example, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental factors (Mader et al. 2013). To successfully implement a “morally robust reform” at institutional level a leader has to be able to combine analytical and emotional knowledge (Fullan & Scott, 2016, p. 8).

Goleman et al. (2001) considered that during challenging times when organizations function in a complex and changing environment, leaders and organizations have to be emotionally intelligent. It is most important that during these times, the leader’s emotions resonate with the overall situation of the organizational environment, and when that takes place these leaders are most effective in leading their teams, especially during stressful times (Rajah et al., 2011). Drucker (2005) stated that consumers should be the first constituent everyone in the organization should serve. Especially in this day and age when access to information is readily available, the main focus of an organization has to be to satisfy their customers. The leader’s role is to balance multiple and sometimes different expectations of their constituents and demonstrate
their ability to lead their team in meeting or even surpassing these expectations. They have to inspire and motivate each of their team members to accept this shift in the organizational culture, to support it, and implement it during each of their customer interactions.

Organizational change – Transforming for sustainability. The type of changes organizations are implementing nowadays were not deemed possible three decades ago, and over the next 10 years, countless leaders will have to implement an extraordinary organizational transformation that is a “social and economic necessity” to ensure the survival of their organizations (Hacker & Roberts, 2003, p. 271). To have a transformational impact organization wide, when launching an initiative that promotes systemic change at organizational level, higher education leaders have to be committed to ensure that the transformation is sustainable, consistent, and it is implemented effectively with a focus on the future and not the actual state of the institution (Mader et al., 2013). Everyone involved in implementing transforming initiatives in a higher education institution has to be aware that this is a process that usually “unfolds in a rising spiral of implementation, review and enhancement” and it is not an isolated event implemented in a “rigid linear fashion” (p. 272). Mader et al. considered that implementing transformation in a higher education institution requires leaders to ensure a co-creation environment allowing for the organization and its stakeholders to cooperate and organizational change is most effective when it is intentional.

To survive and remain competitive, organizations have to constantly adapt, adjust, and change with their environment. However, Cohen and Tedesco (2009) argued that organizations should seek to lead and thrive, not just to survive in their constantly changing environment. Implementing constant changes have an impact on the organization as well as on their employees. To sustain the competitive advantage of an organization, its workforce uses their
technical skills and core competencies; however, for the organization to outperform other organizations, managing the relationships that employees build with others, inside and outside the organization, is the determining factor that provides the competitive advantage for the respective organization (Pinos et al., 2006). When channeled appropriately, the emotional energy of the employees will enable organizations to implement and achieve their strategic changes. As a result, it is considered that emotional intelligence can facilitate organizational change (Vakola, et al., 2004).

Fullan and Scott (2009) identified that the higher up an institution is placed on the educational level, the more difficult it is to implement the change. Further, the literature demonstrates that higher education institutions are most resistant to implementing change compared with educational institutions from lower educational levels (Fullan & Scott, 2009). Cohen and Tedesco (2009) considered that an adaptive leadership style “less accidental, less technical, and adaptive” (p. 3) will generate sustained change and innovation for the institution.

Kezar (2009) argued that the challenges encountered by colleges and universities in implementing change are due to the high number of initiatives implemented simultaneously that prevent successful implementation of meaningful change at organizational level. There are other elements that prevent systemic organizational change in the higher education environment, for example, employees’ resistance, the absence of leaders’ vision, poor long-term planning, proper strategizing, and lack of communication (Kezar, 2009). To successfully implement change in an educational system, Fullan (2015) acknowledged that highly effective leaders establish a collaborative culture, promoting the change, and act as a “lead learner,” “using the group to change the group” (p. 35). Organizations with a higher level of employees’ engagement promote practicing clear and candid communication, striving for simplicity, and reducing the complexity,
and to be able to transition from “freedom from” toward “freedom to,” four factors play a major role: “autonomy and cooperation, feedback, accountability and diffusion” (Fullan, 2015, p. 27).

Kezar (2009) discussed the reasons why change is more welcomed in a business environment than in higher education and that is in part explained by the usually limited and typical changes that have to be implemented to increase the revenue and profit generated by business. Whereas higher education institutions have to meet the approval of a much wider array of stakeholders, and that makes it much more difficult to converge their efforts towards achieving the common goal. The agents of change and the leaders in charge of implementing changes at organizational level in higher education have to focus on creating a greater synergy in synchronizing the efforts of all parties involved in the process of change (Kezar, 2009).

**Summary and conclusion.** The common end goal of organizational change is to implement fundamental changes to help it adjust to a more challenging environment, and in order to implement these changes successfully, new systems and strong leadership advocating for change and promoting the organizational transformation are required (Kotter, 1995). By embracing their heritage, colleges and universities can build on their strengths while their administrators act as “architects of change” (p. 21) for their institutions to continue to deliver on the promise of higher education of enabling their students’ dreams to come true (Gee, 2009).

**Educational Leaders of the Future**

Fullan (2002) considered that educational leaders of the future have to accustom themselves to the challenges and opportunities of the new environment in which their organization operates and to become “much more sophisticated at conceptual thinking, and transforming the organization through people and teams” (p. 3). Leaders help their teams achieve more as a group that what would have been possible to be achieved individually, undertake risks
when needed, and inspire their teams to delivering strong performance by creating organizations that are agile and highly competitive at the global level (Kouzes & Posner, 2013). Scott (2018) considered that leaders of higher education institutions of the 21st century have to maintain a fine balance between corporatizing the institution to make sure it will be able to adjust and adapt to its new environment and applying the focus on fulfilling its mission and achieving its long-term goals, such as research and development and promoting innovation.

**Executive leaders in academia.** A crucial unit in transforming the higher education institutional mission into reality is the academic department. It is within this academic unit that leadership must be developed.

Knights and Wall (2013) considered that leadership skills can be learned through leadership trainings and that a professional in a senior level role should have both management and leadership skills. The findings of the study conducted by Gosling et al. (2009) emphasized the benefits of providing formal leadership training to the newly appointed academic administrators into executive positions, since it was determined that leadership skills could be learned and developed. This type of training can be implemented as a standard procedure within colleges and universities to improve the leadership skills of their new academic administrators members of the executive leadership team at their respective institutions.

Selingo et al. (2017) mentioned that the Provost role has significantly evolved in a short amount of time. For example, in the past, the Provost was considered the second in command after the College’s President. Now, however, they are expected to have a set of skills that are complementing rather than replicating the president’s skills. With the changes in higher education and the transformation from “collegiate” to the “corporate” environment that colleges
and universities are experiencing in the past years, more and more members of the academe have had to take on leadership roles, with very little prior leadership training (Gosling et al., 2009).

Kouzes and Posner (2013) posited that to be effective in modeling the behavior they expect from their teams, leaders have to clearly define their guiding principles and values. These leaders are well aware that their teams are respecting the behavior they exhibit, their credibility and how they align their “words and deeds” (p. 4). Effective leaders “model the way” (p. 4) for their teams through their daily actions. This can include, for example, their time management practices, behavior, and how they give recognition to their teams. Exceptional leaders build a common vision based on their skills of identifying future opportunities, their team’s aspirations, and they are able to create a shared vision by inspiring their team members to engage their professional aspirations with a common goal of the group (Kouzes & Posner, 2013).

Abdullah et al. (2008) emphasized the speed of change that shapes the environment of the educational systems in developed countries for the past 30 years. The changes encountered by institutions in higher education could have a negative impact on their team’s performance, and overall on the school’s performance, if the academic leader is not able to adjust their leadership style to ensure the faculty members embrace the new culture they need to establish with the adjusted behaviors expected in the different environment they operate.

Avolio et al. (2000) discussed the effects the globalization has on the markets when virtual interaction between organizations’ representatives and their customers becomes as important as in-person interactions. The same concept can apply for the interactions between a teacher and their students in a virtual classroom when the course is taught online, and when they teach a class on campus and the interactions take place in person. To adjust to higher standards and expectations, future academic leaders have to ensure their teams adapt to the new
requirements and yet remain productive in traditional “old world order” (Avolio et al., 2000, p. 615).

The professionals transitioning into a new leadership role will have to be trained in multiple leadership styles, to ensure that they are ready and able to meet all the expectations and responsibilities of the role. Leadership style consists of “the behavior pattern of a person who attempts to influence others” (Northouse, 2016, p. 94). Several leadership styles, such as shared (collaborative), distributive, and authentic leadership, will be described in greater details in the next sections. The new leaders should determine the type of the leadership style that increases their leadership effectiveness, and that could change depending on the stages in their tenure in the role. While there is a common understanding that most of the skills of tomorrow’s executives can be taught, since each professional has a unique set of strengths and talents, it is mainly agreed that their leadership training and development program cannot be standardized (Heames & Harvey, 2006).

**Leaders as a catalyst for sustainable change.** Mader et al. (2013) considered that colleges and universities can apply a more concerted focus in implementing effectively and sustainably their sought-after transformation at the institutional level. These scholars stated that to be able to implement effective transformation in a higher education institution, its leaders have to nurture a collaborative environment in which the college or university and its wide variety of stakeholders, for example, staff members, students, faculty, local and regional agencies, support each other’s efforts in this endeavor of transforming the organization. To establish this type of the environment, the literature states that leaders should be the catalyst of change promoting and rewarding an organizational culture focused on collaboration and motivating with proper incentives all the constituents involved in supporting the implementation of the changes, and the
administrative systems in place are “fit-for-purpose” of providing support to the organization implementing the changes (Mader et al., 2013, p. 272).

Fullan (2012) recommends that leaders seeking to implement change in their organizations, practice impressive empathy, and by doing that they will change the dynamic of their relationships with various constituents. “Impressive empathy” requires the leader to understand the point of view of people opposing the change to be implemented, “as if I were in their shoes” (Fullan, 2012, p. 12). The tendency to resist change is a result of reacting to loss and that can be fundamentally addressed through focused and intentional engagement, and leading with the purpose of changing an institution should be considered an activity and not viewed as a formal authoritarian role (Cohen & Tedesco, 2009).

Weick (1987) posited that a stable outcome is reached by continuous change and not through ”continuous repetition” (p. 119). He considered that when a problem is resolved, people have the tendency to “stop making continuous adjustments” (p. 119). Andersson (2015) stated that “change induces controversy and resistance, regardless of support” (p. 48). When change is implemented in an organization, resistance is encountered for practices and frameworks that are already in place, and the new practices are at times, implemented in competition with the existing practices (Andersson, 2015).

Since implementing change is establishing a new process in “parallel and competition with something already in place,” the resistance encountered is considered rather a passive process versus an active process (Andersson, 2015, p. 50). Scholars recommended “recruiting allies from within the people” (p. 50) to implement the organizational change with less resistance, positing that “it is easier to build on and not compete with the local knowledge” (Andersson, 2015, p. 50). Boucher et al. (2006) emphasized that the inertia of organizations to
change is linked to their segmentation and incoherence, “whereas the ability to change relates to coherence and integration” (p. 211). Niess (2008), as quoted in Herring et al. (2013), considered that for the change to be effective, the future teachers need to be open to “rethink, unlearn and relearn, change, revise and adapt” (p. 55). Herring et al. (2013) considered that for organizational change to be implemented successfully, its leaders have to establish a “collaborative ongoing process,” and they have to be “an integral part of this process” (p. 50).

A transformational leadership implemented by the school’s leader builds a high level of commitment to change for their faculty to the uncertainty generated by change, and this leadership style is associated with the school leaders’ effectiveness in materializing the reform plans. The leadership model generated by Kouzes and Posner (2013) illustrated that being a leader is not just “a position, it is a collection of practices and behaviors” (p. 650), and highly effective leaders are encouraging the hearts of their followers, fostering collaboration within their team members, and empowering them to be active supporters of implementing the needed changes.

**Summary and conclusion.** Executive leaders in academia are the catalyst for sustainable change and transformation in higher education institutions. The leaders of the future need to be supportive and able to implement a 21st century agenda to ensure growth for their institutions, and they have to become “sustainability literate and change implementation savvy” (Mader et al., 2013, p. 274). For the organizational transformation to be sustainable, leaders will have to ensure that their teams are engaged, supportive of the change, and committed to implement it. When leaders promote a collaborative team environment, and they nurture the relationships with their followers, they can be more effective in implementing the changes.
Emotionally Intelligent Leadership

Ilies et al. (2013) noted that based on an increased number of research findings “emotions play a central role in leadership” (p. 4). Miller and Sardais (2011) considered that leadership has an emotional component to it since the connection between the leader and their followers involve sharing something personally, and for that to take place, an emotional connection has to be established. Emotions play a dual role in leadership since leaders are expected to possess specific emotional traits to be appointed in their role and deemed as effective, and they also have to manage their followers’ emotions (Rajah et al., 2011). Carmeli (2003) presented several alternatives in which emotional intelligence had a positive influence on the leadership style of a professional. They are listed below:

- When leaders are able to recognize their own emotions, they are understood better by their followers;
- When leaders are able to perceive and understand the emotions of their followers, they have a higher potential of better leading and managing their followers;
- Leaders with a higher level of emotional intelligence have the ability to positively influence their followers;
- Leaders with the ability to understand better the emotions displayed by their followers, have the potential to improve their decision-making process (Carmeli, 2003).

Leaders can increase their influence by matching their emotional display with their followers’ personality and that will increase the team’s performance, too (Van Cleef et al., 2010). The emotional component of sharing a leader’s vision is an important component in motivating the followers to carry on this shared vision and in obtaining their commitment (Waldman et al., 2011).
Emotional intelligence components. Emotional intelligence becomes more and more significant in the professional world since emotions gained traction in the workplace and displaying emotions throughout the interactions between leaders and their followers are more common nowadays than it was decades ago. In any working environment, employees are encouraged to express their emotions, and they became omnipresent and an important component of the organizational culture. Koning and Van Cleef (2015) argued that emotions displayed in the work environment, such as excitement and a sense of accomplishment when the task is completed, or disappointment over a missed opportunity, have an impact on the organizational behavior of the employees.

There are numerous definitions, and there are different schools of thoughts on the emotional intelligence of an individual. Brown and Moshavi (2005) summarized the various interpretations of this intelligence in three distinct categories, as listed below:

- **Trait** – emotional intelligence is an innate quality facilitating emotional balance;
- **Competency** – emotional intelligence is a set of developed skills and aptitudes;
- **Capability** – emotional intelligence is an intellectual capability to process emotions. (p. 879)

Mayer et al. (2008) viewed emotional intelligence as an ability to understand one’s and others’ emotions and to apply emotions and the emotional intellect to enrich the reasoning process. Emotional intelligence is not an individual's personality; it is their ability to develop and manage the skills and the traits that define their character, internal and external (Chopra & Kanji, 2010). Goleman, Boyatzis, Mayer and Salovey, are seminal authors who conducted extensive research on emotional intelligence. Several models define emotional intelligence as a set of traits, skills, or abilities that influence the leadership style of a manager.
Goleman launched his first emotional intelligence model in 1995 and refined it in 2001. His model included four components of emotional intelligence, as listed below:

1) Emotional Self-Awareness - the individual is aware of their feelings;
2) Social Awareness - the individual is able to recognize other people’s emotions, especially the negative emotions;
3) Relationship Management - the relationship effectiveness of an individual;
4) Emotional Self-Management - the individual is able to inhibit emotional impulsiveness (Goleman, 2001).

Preliminary research showed that people with a high level of emotional intelligence are perceived more positively by the people they interact with, and they are considered to have a higher level of empathy and higher level of performance and success in their career (Mayer et al., 2008).

These four dimensions of the emotional intelligence model developed by Mayer and Salovey in 1997, as included in Wong and Law (2002) are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

Mayer and Salovey’s Emotional Intelligence Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>The individual knows the reason of their feelings; The individual understands their emotions; The individual understands their feelings; The individual knows their moods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEA</td>
<td>The individual recognizes others’ emotions based on their behavior; The individual is able to observe others’ emotions; The individual is sensitive to others’ emotions; The individual understands others’ emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UOE</td>
<td>The individual sets their own goals and strives to achieve them; The individual is confident of their competencies; The individual is self-motivated; The individual strives to do their best.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROE</td>
<td>The individual is monitoring their behavior and their reactions in challenging times; The individual is able to control their emotions; The individual is able to control their temper; The individual is able to manage their emotional response.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Wong and Law, 2002, p. 270
Emotional intelligence plays an increased role in influencing and defining the leadership style of an executive. The influence of emotional intelligence on various leadership styles, such as shared (collaborative) and distributive leadership will be discussed further in the section.

Butler et al. (2014) shared that leaders who have a high level of self-awareness understand better their actions’ impact on their followers, for example, their increased ability to customize their messages to their audience, such as setting and communicating the team’s goals, and being a “flexible problem-solvers as well as a less rigid decision-makers” (p. 88). Bratton et al. (2011) posited that managers with a high level of emotional intelligence have the ability to accurately evaluate their performance, confirming that there is a robust relationship between the emotional intelligence of an individual and their leadership when they are accurately evaluating their leadership abilities. The converse applies, managers with a low level of emotional intelligence are less likely to perceive a decreased job satisfaction level among their team members (Bratton et al., 2011).

It is crucial for leaders to be able to understand and manage their team members’ emotions, specifically those emotions related to optimism and frustration (Humphrey, 2002). Koning and Van Cleef (2015) noted that leaders’ emotions, such as anger and happiness, impact the willingness of their followers to get involved in the organizational citizenship behavior.

**Transformational leadership and emotional intelligence.** Transformational leaders are perceived as agents of change in the organization, their conduct is usually considered a model behavior, and one of their main characteristic is their ability to set new paths for their teams (Cavazotte et al., 2012). These leaders set high expectations, support individual development, articulate a compelling vision for their teams and achieve outstanding results. Transformational leaders display an individual focused behavior, connecting individually with their team
members, developing their abilities and set of skills and empowering them to achieve their full potential. Their leadership style is customized to each individual team member to help them achieve their aspirations and goals. This allows their teams to be intellectually stimulated, and as a result, the job satisfaction of their team members is positively influenced (Braun et al., 2013).

At the same time, transformational leaders practice a group focused behavior, by setting a common goal for the team, sharing the same vision and bringing the group together to achieve the team goals (Wang & Howell, 2012). Eiseneiss et al. (2008) considered that transformational leadership encourages supportive behaviors among team members. This leadership style “triggers followers’ exploratory and critical thinking process” (p. 1440). This confirms the dual level of transformational leadership, individual and group focused (Wang & Howell, 2012). A transformational leader has a great effect on their team members, and they are able to build solid relationships based on trust with their followers. The team members admire and become loyal to their leader, and they are motivated to do more than what is expected of them or they intended to do initially for their leader and the organization (Yukl, 1999).

The transformational leadership model was launched by Burns in 1978, then developed by Bass in 1985, and refined in 1994 by Bass and Avolio. It includes four dimensions:

1) Idealized influence (II) – a leader acts as a role model to their followers;

2) Individual consideration (IC) – a leader provides support to each of their team members;

3) Intellectual stimulation (IS) – the leader encourages the thinking process for their followers;

4) Inspirational motivation (IM) – the leader is an inspiration to their followers (Bass & Avolio, 1999)
Ilies et al. (2013) considered that leaders who have better capabilities to express their emotions in the work environment are able to positively influence the performance outcomes of their teams due to a higher level of idealized influence they have on their followers, which, in return, has a positive influence on their emotional expressiveness and leadership effectiveness.

Butler et al. (2014) underlined the importance of the research findings showing the positive relationship between leaders’ self-awareness and their transformational leadership style, by stating that self-awareness skills are important for the perception and prediction of the leadership effectiveness considering how focused the leader is on the relationships they establish with their followers. Abdullah et al. (2008) stated that team members need constant encouragement and motivation from their leader to accomplish the team’s goals, and transformational leaders inspire their teams to perform at higher levels by recognizing and celebrating their followers.

Frooman et al. (2012) described the four dimensions of the transformational leadership style based on the model developed by Bass and Avolio in 1999, as including the four components: a) idealized influence, where the leaders articulates the group vision for their teams; b) inspirational motivation, where the leader is able to increase their followers’ aspirations; c) intellectual stimulation, where the leader involves the followers in the decision making process; and d) individualized consideration, where the leader encourages their followers individually and provides to them constructive feedback.

Nazim and Mahmood (2016) considered that transformational leadership initiates change, and they listed two factors contributing to the success of an organization: leadership effectiveness and employees’ job satisfaction. Their study showed that a transformational leadership style impacts positively the job satisfaction of an employee. The quality of the
leadership style, implemented by a leader in an organization, can play a significant role in the organization effectiveness and the employees’ welfare. The success and efficiency of an organization is impacted by the efficiency of its leaders.

The leadership roles have become more demanding due to the changes in the organizational environment, such as developing technologies and changes at the global level. To help their followers adapt and cope with these changes, leaders are expected to inspire and motivate them and foster “positive job attitudes” (Underwood et al., 2015, p. 100). Cheung and Wong (2011) posited that employees’ creativity is a major factor in increasing the competitive advantage of an organization in times of increased competition. A transformational leader can inspire their followers to go above and beyond their capabilities in completing their tasks (Cheung & Wong, 2011). This leadership style is effective in increasing the performance expectations for employees and changing their values such as their creativity, organizational commitment, citizenship behavior and attendance (Cheung & Wong, 2011). Research showed that the transformational leadership style implemented by a leader has a significant influence on the professional attitude and behavior of their followers. However, how this influence occurs had not been studied systematically (Castro et al., 2008).

Brown and Moshavi (2005) posited the “possibility of an interactive or additive effect between EI and transformational leadership” (p. 870), as illustrated in Figure 2, and listed below:

1. **EI Antecedent** – an individual with a raised level of emotional intelligence displays a behavior consistent with transformational leadership;

2. **EI Moderator** – transformational leadership increases with a high level of emotional intelligence;

3. **EI Independent** – emotional intelligence is directly connected with the desired
outcomes of transformational leadership. (p. 870)

**Figure 2**

*Interaction Between Emotional Intelligence and Transformational Leadership*

Adapted from Brown and Moshavi (2005).

Avolio et al. (2004) posited that transformational leaders have a positive impact on their followers’ commitment to the organization. These leaders are motivating their teams to be more innovative and to play a role in the decision-making process by identifying their unique needs to reach their professional potential. They use coaching and mentoring techniques for their followers encouraging them to seek a higher level of responsibility and developing them into future leaders.

Solid performance is delivered when there is strong positive motivation provided to the team members. Motivation and inspiration leadership style are terms used interchangeably. Indrawati (2014) separates them and makes a clear distinction between these two styles; motivation can be either positive or negative, whereas inspiration is only positive.

With the market competition sharply increasing for many colleges and universities, either public or private, these are the times when staff members need to deliver their discretionary effort. Providing the extra effort takes place only when the teams are fully engaged and
supportive of the organization’s vision and its culture. Ghadi et al. (2012) posited that transformational leadership has an influence on employees’ engagement. Bass and Avolio (1995) noted that transformational leadership motivates employees to do more than is expected of them by increasing their awareness of the significance of the results, motivating them to value more the interests of the team and the organizations and their interests.

Leadership Effectiveness in Academia

The performance of higher education professionals is influenced by numerous factors, and leadership effectiveness has a major role in that performance as well as in the improvement of the institution’s performance and development (Nazim & Mahmood, 2016). Minimal research has been published showing the criteria to support the attainment of moderate leadership effectiveness in higher education. More research needs to be conducted to determine the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness (Rosete & Chiarrochi, 2005). Wong and Law (2002) believed that in order for leaders to be effective in managing their teams, they have to be able to understand emotions, their own and others, and to control their emotions during interactions with other individuals. Northouse (2016) considered that to be effective in their role, leaders have to adapt their style according to the various situations’ demands.

Even though leadership effectiveness has been studied since the early 1930s, the main factors that have an impact on it continue to be a topic for research (Higgs & Rowland, 2002). One of the main causes is that the requirements and expectations of a leader to be effective are not clearly set, and their results can be accomplished by implementing various methods. Rosete and Chiarrochi (2005) considered that it is challenging to measure leadership effectiveness due to the absence of “objective criteria” (p. 390). Yang and Zhu (2016) claimed that leadership
effectiveness is reflected by the ability of a leader to influence their followers’ work performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior. Leadership effectiveness, as described by Mora and Ticlau (2012), can take various forms, for example, the leader meets the expectations of the role and their organizational requirements, represents their group well to higher authorities, and helps their followers being effective in their roles.

**Effective leadership.** Gonaim (2016) argued that leadership effectiveness is contextual, being defined and shaped by the circumstances and the organizational environment in which the leaders operate. Research showed that for leaders at organizations that encounters change, “effective leadership requires a combination of well-developed emotional intelligence and specific change leadership competencies” (Higgs & Rowland, 2002, p. 73). Northouse (2016) posited that leaders who are effective in their roles are able to recognize their followers’ needs, and they adapt their leadership style accordingly to meet those specific needs.

McCormick (2001) argued that the leader’s effectiveness in their role can be viewed as a “socially mediated outcome” (p. 28) due to the fact that it is a result of members of a group coordinating their efforts, and he defined the leader’s role as a “causal agent” since they have to take action on a leadership situation instead of “responding to it” (p. 28). The effectiveness of a leader will be determined by the legacy they leave behind and not by who they are as professionals (Fullan, 2002).

Research showed that for leaders in an organization that encounters change “effective leadership requires a combination of well-developed emotional intelligence and specific change leadership competencies” (Higgs & Rowland, 2002, p. 73). Gardner and Stough (2002) emphasized the benefits of using emotional intelligence in predicting a future leader’s
effectiveness. Research showed that the ability to understand others’ emotions increases a leader effectiveness by allowing them to better understand different points of view (Gardner & Stough, 2002).

For leaders to be effective in managing their teams, they have to be able to understand emotions, their own and others, and they need to control their emotions during interactions with other individuals (Wong & Law, 2002). Underwood et al. (2015) considered that leadership effectiveness has a direct impact on the effectiveness of any institution. The ability to influence others is a basic description of being a leader, as this is a complex process involving a group of professionals pursuing a common organizational goal and the dynamic between the leader and their followers is reciprocated since they have an influence on each other (Underwood et al., 2015). The leader’s behavior toward his followers defines his leadership style. The leadership effectiveness of several leadership styles, such as shared leadership, distributed leadership, and transformational leadership, is discussed next.

Bolden (2011) noted that several leadership styles called for a similar reframing of how leadership is perceived, such as collaborative, emergent, and distributive leadership. This scholar listed Pearce et al. (2008) reasons for this change in the leadership perception, due to the increase in the delivery speed, an increased level of complexity in the job description, and the instant access to information.

The shared leadership effectiveness was described by Muethel and Hoegl (2013) as the influence exerted by a team member toward a specific peer, and the peer’s acceptance of that specific influence. Shared leadership is defined as the influence team members have on each other as they share the leadership role, with the objective to lead their peers in order to achieve their team goal (Muethel & Hoegl, 2013). The focus of shared leadership is on the interactions
between peers in self-managed teams, taking temporarily an influencer role (leader) toward another influenced peer (follower), rather than a traditional interaction between an appointed leader and their followers (Muethel & Hoegl, 2013). Drescher et al. (2014) considered that the increase of shared leadership within a group has a positive influence in the increase of the trust among the group members. These scholars posited that a leader serves multiple functions and based on the concept of shared leadership, these functions need not to be completed only by one professional. Another benefit of the shared leadership is the positive effect it has on the group’s performance (Drescher et al., 2014).

Bolden (2011) described distributed leadership as “a group activity that works through and within relationships, rather than individual action” (p. 252). Lumby (2013) considered the distributed leadership a widely implemented leadership style, with a widespread implementation especially in the education field, considering it as “revitalizing and inclusive” (p. 581). The seminal scholars, Gronn (2000) and Spillane et al. (2004) considered distributed leadership a “heuristic tool” (p. 582). Distributed leadership increases the effectiveness in implementing organizational change since it engages a higher number of staff members and in a complex environment the leadership is more successful when the experience and the set of skills are provided by a group of professionals with an increased level of diversity (Lumby, 2013). Distributed leadership should be analyzed from a holistic perspective instead of being considered a combination of the contributions of the team members (Bolden, 2011).

Butler et al. (2014) posited that emotional intelligence and its components, especially the self-awareness, is related to an increase in perception of the leader’s effectiveness. Leaders with a higher level of self-awareness are perceived to have a lesser degree of inflexibility in their decision-making process. They have a better understanding of their impact on followers, and this
emotional awareness allows them to better communicate team’s goals and develop customized messages for their teams. This increases their leadership effectiveness by setting a higher level of trust and collaboration within their teams, as these type of leaders are very aware of their actions and behaviors and that contributes to increasing their leadership effectiveness (Butler et al., 2014).

McCormick (2001) emphasized the role self-confidence has as “an essential characteristic for effective leadership” (p. 23), and he noted the findings regarding the relationship between the self-confidence of a leader and the success they achieve in their role. One common characteristic of effective leaders is their confidence in their set of skills and abilities needed to fulfill their responsibilities of their leadership role. Therefore, self-confidence has become a main trait for leadership effectiveness (McCormick, 2001). Since self-confidence is considered a trait, it is useful only to describe or anticipate the professional’s behavior. Butler et al. (2014) considered that leaders with an increased level of self-awareness are able to recognize how their actions are perceived by others, and they have the ability to establish trust and solid collaboration with their followers, which overall increases their leadership effectiveness. McCormick (2001) considered a leader successful when they are able to use their social influence for organizing, directing, and motivating the actions of their followers, and since achieving a team’s goal requires a coordinated effort of the team’s members, a professional effective in a leader’s role is a “socially mediated outcome” (p. 28). Ilies et al. (2013) noted the research findings on the relationship between the idealized influence component of the transformational leadership style and the followers’ perception of the leadership effectiveness. These scholars confirmed the research findings that transformational leadership style is highly effective for predicting employees’ outcomes, such as their job satisfaction, performance level, and motivation.
The existing literature illustrated that the behavior associated with the charismatic leadership had a significant impact on leadership effectiveness, and it can influence the organizational growth, by recruiting and retaining qualified staff, inspiring the cohesion of the team, support their staff to agree on personal and organizational goals and improve “cross-border communication” (Yang & Zhou, 2016, p. 178).

Leadership effectiveness has four dimensions: work performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and “organizational citizenship behavior” (Yang & Zhu, 2016, p.161). The emotional component of sharing a leader’s vision is an important factor in motivating the followers to carry on this shared vision and in obtaining their commitment (Waldman et al., 2011).

Castro et al. (2008) noted that there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and leadership effectiveness, providing an example of this relationship such as the followers’ job satisfaction, motivation, and performance. Waldman et al. (2011) posited that effective leadership requires achieving a balance between the leader’s own emotions while they minimize the negative emotions encountered by the followers which might have a demotivating effect for them.

**Summary and Conclusion of the Literature Review**

Barbuto and Burbach (2006) argued that emotional intelligence is an essential factor for leadership effectiveness, and they considered that transformational leaders who are connecting with their followers emotionally and respond empathically to them can increase organizational effectiveness. Leaders who have a solid understanding of their emotions and others’ emotions will be effective in managing their teams (Wong & Law, 2002). Even though a growing body of literature shows the important role emotions hold in influencing leadership style, there is limited
knowledge of how leaders can increase their leadership effectiveness by enhancing their ability to express their emotions to their followers (Ilies et al., 2013). Future research is needed to identify the channels, methods, and mechanisms leaders can implement to effectively relay their emotions in the workplace, and as a result, influence their followers’ perceptions of their leadership style and overall leadership effectiveness (Ilies et al., 2013).

This body of research has demonstrated the need for implementing sustainable organizational change in colleges and universities to ensure that they continue to accomplish their mission of educating the workforce of the future for generations to come. Further, the research showcases the influence emotional intelligence and transformational leadership style have in setting a new leader on a successful path. However, there is a dearth of theory and research of the factors that influence the leadership effectiveness of C-level executives in higher education institutions.

Gooty et al. (2010) stated that while there is an abundance of theories related to the significance of leaders’ emotional intelligence, the debates related to the influence emotional intelligence has on leadership effectiveness are still unsettled. Therefore, this study tried to determine how academic executives in higher education made sense of their leadership effectiveness in their roles to fill a gap in the literature.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative IPA study was to explore the leadership behaviors and lived experiences of eight academic executives in academia and their own sensemaking of the elements that had impacted their leadership effectiveness in their current roles. The knowledge generated from the data gathered during this research can help increase awareness of the influences on leadership effectiveness, and it can help newly appointed academic leaders increase their leadership effectiveness in the current and future climate of higher education.

The literature review revealed that there is a dearth of theory and research of the elements that influence the leadership effectiveness of academic executives in higher education. Even though there is an abundance of theories related to the significance of a leader’s emotional intelligence, the deliberations related to the influence of emotional intelligence on leadership effectiveness are still not settled (Gooty et al., 2010). A need to investigate was identified to discern the factors that have an impact on the effectiveness of a leader in higher education, specifically the effect that emotional intelligence has on their leadership style, with a focus on the transformational leadership style. Because the research sought to explore socially constructed meanings of the participants, it was deemed appropriate to apply qualitative methodology for conducting this study.

This research explored the leadership effectiveness from three vantage points: a) the lived experience of academic executives (in place); b) their perceptions of the elements that impacted positively or negatively their leadership effectiveness; and c) their perception of leadership effectiveness in higher education.

This research focused on the following main research question with two sub-questions:

How do today’s academic leaders of higher education institutions perceive and make sense of their experience as leaders?
1. What is the perception of academic leaders of leadership effectiveness in higher education?

2. How do executive academic leaders make sense of the influences on their own leadership effectiveness?

In this chapter, the qualitative research approach will be discussed, the selection process of the participants is described, data collection procedures, data analysis and considerations, and trustworthiness of the study will be addressed.

**Research Design and Rationale**

Considering the intent of this study is to explore the lived experiences and leadership behaviors of senior level academic leaders (in place), and the sensemaking these professionals have reached on their professional experiences and leadership effectiveness, qualitative research was deemed to be the most appropriate method to conduct this investigation. Ponterotto (2005) stated that the qualitative research methods reflect the participants’ experiences as they lived them in the settings that were context-specific, and as a result, the findings of the qualitative research are delivered in the common language used by the participants when describing their lived experiences.

**Research Methodology**

Hartel et al. (2015) defined the main goal of the IPA qualitative methodology as capturing rich descriptions of how participants are making sense of their experiences. Conducting this specific qualitative research matched the recommendation made by Ponterotto (2005) who claimed that the researcher’s goal should be rather to understand the lived experience of their participants from the participants’ perspective.

Ponterotto (2005) posited that the essence of the constructivist-interpretivism paradigm is that the reality is a result of individual interpretation, as it is constructed in one’s mind, rather
than existing on its own as an entity. Using the constructivist-interpretivism approach, the participant’s reality cannot be separated from the person experiencing and making sense of that respective reality (Ponterotto, 2005). For conducting this study, qualitative IPA was considered to be the most appropriate method because of its key aspect to elicit data from participants on their own sensemaking of their experiences. The prior background in higher education of the investigator allowed for a deep understanding of the experiences shared by the participants, an accurate interpretation of their sensemaking process, and a thorough analysis. Smith (1996) believed that IPA consists of a chain reaction between the participant and their emotional reaction as they describe their lived experiences and how they make sense of it.

IPA was launched in mid 1990s by Smith (2010) as a methodology for experiential qualitative psychology. Smith stated that IPA “has a lens focused sharply on individual experience” (p. 55). Brocki and Wearden (2006) argued that the main goal of conducting an IPA is to conduct a detailed exploration of the process the study participants go through when they make sense of their experiences. The exploring takes place by evaluating the participant’s description of the process they encountered, and applying the general assumption of the natural inclination towards the participants’ tendency of self-reflecting. One of the main characteristics of this qualitative research methodology is that it provides a “rich and detailed portrayal of personal experience” (Smith, 2011, p. 56).

To ensure a high quality IPA study was conducted, the following criteria were followed: (a) a deep level of interpretation was reached; (b) a sensitive analysis was conducted; and (c) the signs provided by the participants during the interview were emphasized (Smith, 2011). Gill (2015) considered that the IPA is rather a method of approaching qualitative research instead of being a methodology in itself. The basis of the IPA is the concept that human beings experience
their social environment in a subjective manner (Gill, 2015). Ponterotto & Grieger (2007) recommended that the researcher connects at a higher level with their readers, and they resonate with their audiences by providing convincing details and supporting evidence for the credibility of the “study’s findings and interpretations” (p. 414). To be effective in sharing their research findings using a qualitative methodology, the researchers should use “thick description” that leads to “thick interpretation,” which in the end generates for the reader a “thick meaning” (p. 416).

In essence, an IPA allows the researcher to analyze the data gathered by understanding the meaning for participants when they shared their experiences regarding a specific situation (Larkin et al., 2006). The qualitative IPA focuses on sensemaking activities and provides the opportunity to interpret the meaning of the participants’ feelings with the identified specific context (Larkin et al., 2006). The key aspect of the IPA is that the researcher gathers data from participants by soliciting their understanding of an event, and after that, they describe their own understanding and interpretation of the participant’s sensemaking of the respective event (Larkin et al., 2006).

Conducting a qualitative research study using IPA required collecting “rich” data, meaning that participants were given enough time to provide detailed answers, sharing stories, reflecting on their experiences, and developing their thoughts (Smith et al., 2013). Ponterotto & Grieger (2007) stated that when used properly, a thick description of the research findings provides much more than just the facts, it “evokes emotionality and self-feelings” (p. 416). To ensure that the interactions with the participants took place at a greater level of detail, the interviews conducted for this study were semi-structured, allowing for participants to take extra time when they needed for providing their answers. Participating in one-on-one, semi-structured
interviews allowed the respondents to share their feelings, thoughts, and stories at a greater level of detail (Smith et al., 2013). This was one of the main goals when conducting this IPA study.

**The Research Tradition in IPA**

Smith (2011) described three foci for the IPA: (a) examining in great detail in the “personal lived” experiences of the participants; (b) the “meaning of experience to participants”; and (c) the sensemaking process of the experience for the participants (p. 9). These three foci were applied to this method of inquiry when conducting this study. Gill (2015) considered that using IPA for studying emotions presents four advantages: 1) provides context in greater detail for the emotions shaping participants’ experiences; 2) explains the social phenomena from the participants’ level, and creates an opportunity to understand the role of emotions; 3) allows for the participants’ voice to be heard, whereas other research methods usually diminish it; and 4) can be used and applied to a diverse range of organizational research topics. Smith (2011) posited that an IPA “clearly is phenomenological, interpretative and analytic” (p. 57). This method of conducting qualitative research is *phenomenological*, since it takes into consideration the lived experiences of the participants; *hermeneutic*, for it contemplates that the studied experience is identified through deliberate interpretation conducted by both the participant and researcher; and *idiographic*, since its completion requires a thorough analysis for each individual case (Smith, 2010).

**Phenomenological.** Husserl introduced the phenomenology concept in 1900-1901, taking a similar approach to the concepts of descriptive psychology considered the “science of the acts and contents of consciousness” (Moran, 2000, p.xiii). Gill (2015) cited Edmund Husserl who defined phenomenology as a “descriptive endeavor that aims to capture the subjective perspective of the individual” (p. 32).
A basic concept of the phenomenology is the “phenomenological description of things just as they are, in the manner in which they appear” (Moran, 2000, p.xiv). Phenomenology is the description of a phenomenon that happened to someone, and it started in their consciousness. As a result, the phenomenology emphasizes the examination from within the structures of an individual’s consciousness, and that presents a challenge for third-person reporting (Gill, 2015). Smith (1996) described phenomenological psychology as an interpretation or description of the personal perception of an event or account as provided by an individual and not their “objective statement of the object or event itself” (p. 263). Gill (2015) posited that phenomenology is a vast concept that includes a philosophical wave, and a wide range of qualitative research examining subjective experiences of human beings. Phenomenological philosophers advocated for applying the phenomenology when studying emotions, as was the case with promoting the research of emotional experiences and their implementation in theories related to organizations.

IPA is considered phenomenological due to the emphasis on the participants’ subjective reporting versus the review of their objective reporting (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Friesen et al. (2012) labeled phenomenology as descriptive, with the main purpose of describing instead of explaining the phenomenon, and these scholars emphasized the distinction “between descriptive phenomenology versus interpretive, or hermeneutic, phenomenology” (p. 21). The name of the IPA signifies the double aspect of this methodology, and the dual reflections of the researcher and the respondents combined into the generated interpretation (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The recommendation provided by Smith (1996) was that researchers focus during the IPA on the meanings an individual constructs for a specific event, as those meanings will be shared “through a process of interpretation” (p. 263).
**Interpretative (hermeneutics).** The participants’ experiences are shaped by their environment since they “do not live in hermetically sealed bubbles” (Smith, 2011, p. 56). The third-person’s understanding of the description provided by participants is interpretative from the very beginning, since the act of disclosure is based on interpretative relations, and that describes the hermeneutical approach (Smith, 1996). The hermeneutic nature of the IPA is generated by the analysis of the experience encountered by a different person, and in order for the researcher to be able to understand and interpret it properly, they have to engage with the participant (Smith, 2011).

The researcher is making sense of the participant’s sensemaking process of their experience, and as a result, IPA requires “engaging in a double hermeneutic” (Smith, 2011, p. 9). Brocki and Wearden (2006) noted that an IPA should not be only the process of restating the participants’ responses, yet at the same time it should not trigger “generalizability” (p. 96). When comparing IPA with other methodologies, it is evident that conducting an IPA study follows a basic process evolving “from descriptive to interpretative” (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 97). Babich and Ginev (2014) noted the distinction between the two facets of the process of interpretation: first, constructing a meaning, and second, explaining of that meaning. These scholars mentioned the basic perception of associating the interpretation with “the understanding of meaning” (Babich & Ginev, 2014, p. 275). The interpretation is not an extra step of the process; it is a consequence of our “being-in-the-world” and revealing of “hidden meanings” (Friesen et al., 2012, p. 22). The interpretation is necessary to describe how the meaning happens in a specific context; therefore, the description of the lived experience of the participants to the study has to be understood in the context of their environment (Friesen et al., 2012).
Analytic (idiography). When conducting an IPA study, the main focus should be on the process of listening and understanding of the stories shared by the participants (Smith, 2011). Moran (2000) referred to the seminal work conducted by Heidegger (1996) who emphasized the importance of how the researcher formulates their questions during the interview, so that they are not building a pre-understanding of the answer they seek, and their questioning does not distort the “very phenomenon under question” (p. 236). To minimize this effect, Heidegger (1996) recommended that a “relatedness backward or forward” takes place during the interview (as cited in Moran, 2000, p. 237). Smith (2011) cautioned against the tendency of researchers to describe the experience instead of seeking to understand the experiences shared by participants, and he emphasized that “the analysis lies in the interpretative work done by the analyst” (p. 58). Gill (2015) viewed IPA as an approach by which the researcher interprets the individual’s experiences in their specific contexts and examines the participant’s understanding and interpretation of their own experiences.

Positionality Statement

As a higher education professional for more than 15 years, I have held progressive leadership positions for almost 10 years. Throughout my tenure, I became aware of the direct influence that the leadership style practiced by a manager can have on each team member and overall on their team’s performance. After I was appointed the location leader of a University Center, during my first two years in the role, I had the opportunity to work with an executive coach. This experience helped me get a better understanding of the important role emotional intelligence played on defining and refining my leadership style and on increasing my leadership effectiveness, and it proved to be extremely beneficial to me as a new leader.
During my formative years as a leader, my main goal was to apply the concepts of positive leadership, even though at the time I was not aware this was a leadership style in itself. I am fully aware of the negative impact a toxic leader can have on their team’s performance as well as the positive impact a transformational leader can have on someone’s performance. As a follower, I had experienced both leadership styles throughout my professional career.

As I advanced my leadership skills, I was given the opportunity to train several leaders, who were newly appointed to their role, and I advocated for them to practice a positive leadership style. Now, I take this a step further and promote the transformational leadership style, since I am fully aware of the major influence it has on an individual’s career. I can say with confidence that I have a positive bias toward transformational leadership and the role emotional intelligence plays in crystalizing it. I have to make a conscious effort to accept that some leaders have a challenge in maintaining a positive leadership style, especially when they operate under pressure of meeting multiple objectives at the same time.

To maintain my neutral position as a researcher, I set a goal to be as thorough as possible when collecting the feedback the academic executives shared when participating in this study. While conducting the study, I implemented strategies to mitigate my biases to guarantee the data collected was analyzed objectively and the conclusions were not reached prematurely (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). I am confident that being aware of my biases toward this topic of research presented an advantage, rather than a disadvantage. For example, even though I did not have to bracket my biases when I conducted this qualitative IPA, I made sure that by choosing the appropriate theoretical framework and research method for this study, the “confirmation bias” was avoided (Butin, 2010, p. 123). I believe that my positionality, educational and professional background, including my biases, were important factors that strengthened my passion for the topic.
of my study and my determination to increase the awareness on the need for developing exceptional leaders ready to lead their teams to success in these challenging times in higher education.

The newly appointed leaders at higher education institutions have great opportunities to define and refine their leadership style. The goal of this research is to motivate new leaders to commit to develop into highly effective leaders in their roles. I am confident this will have a cascade down effect and their followers will strive to become more effective when they assist students in achieving their educational goals. The students of today are the professionals of tomorrow. They are the future leaders who, in return, might strive to become exceptional leaders.

**Population Selection**

This study explored the sensemaking of eight academic officers of their leadership effectiveness, and the factors that had influenced it. Participants engaged within this study included Provosts, Assistant Provosts, Deans of Academic Affairs (DAA), Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs, and Chief Academic Officers (CAO) of four-year public or private colleges and universities from the Northeastern region of the United States. All participants in this study had a terminal degree, they were full-time employees, and had a tenure in an executive role in academia for a minimum of eight years. The criteria of minimum of eight years tenure was applied to ensure that the participants have accumulated a high level of institutional knowledge and specific professional experience in the role.

Smith’s (2011) recommendation was for researchers to conduct a deep analysis with a small sample of participants, versus interviewing numerous participants and developing too many themes for a study. Brocki and Wearden (2006) considered that the researcher’s role is not well defined when conducting interviews, as they could either take a passive approach during the
interview and start their analysis only at the interpretative phase, or they could influence the participants’ answers by implementing an active listening style and asking for extra details on specific topics.

Striving for excellence when conducting an IPA should take into consideration several “key features: depth of interpretation, sensitivity of analysis, the importance of particular utterances” (Smith, 2011, p. 59). Brocki and Wearden (2006) noted that usually IPA studies have small size samples, due to the fact that when the sample is extended, analyzing large sets of data can have a negative impact by diminishing the nuances of the sensemaking process for the participants. The main goal when determining the number of the participants to the study was to avoid data saturation, since there is no ideal size for the sample (Smith & Orborn, 2003, as cited in Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The sample size for this study was eight participants.

Once the university IRB granted the approval for conducting this study, an IRB-approved recruiting flyer was distributed to encourage prospective participants to inquire about the study. A snowballing sample selection technique was implemented, and the participants were asked to recommend this study to their colleagues holding similar roles. The recruiting process involved a certain sequence that included the following steps: 1) identified through various channels, including LinkedIn, potential participants; 2) sent out an invitation to participate in the study to their work email; 3) connected with potential participants and set up appointments for pre-screening interviews; 4) conducted pre-screening interviews by phone or video calls to ensure that the participants meet the selection criteria and explain the study in greater details; and 5) participants were asked to sign and return the Northeastern University Internal Review Board approved consent form. The process of the data collection started as soon as the first participant
was identified and continued until eight participants were selected. Several criteria were applied for selecting the participants for this study. Academic leaders had to have a tenure in their role of at least eight years; there was a preference of maintaining an even gender distribution within the study sample.

The participants were given the option to choose the most convenient location and the format of the interview, either in person or web based. Brocki and Wearden (2006) noted that semi-structured interviews were considered by Smith and Osborn “the exemplary method” for data collection when conducting an IPA (2003, p. 90). Conducting interviews is a process in which both parties, the researcher and the participants collaborate, designating and accepting that participants are the “primary experts” (Alexander & Clare, 2004 as quoted in Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 90). Kvale (1996) described the research interviews as professional discussions designed to reveal participant’s living experience and their understanding of these experiences.

Due to the high level of the specificity of the duties and responsibilities of a higher education academic officer, the participants of the study were selected based on a homogeneous sampling technique. As described by Creswell (2015), the homogeneous sampling takes place when the researcher selects for their study individuals or professionals that have in common a specific set of characteristics. Creswell (2015) posited that it is common for qualitative research studies to have a small number of participants, mainly because that increases the researcher’s ability to generate an in-depth account for each participant. The main goal of a qualitative research should be to describe in greater detail the complexity of the experience or the information shared by participants (Creswell, 2015). This concept was confirmed by Smith (2011) who emphasized that the main focus of conducting an
IPA for the researcher is to attempt “a rich and detailed portrayal of personal experience” (p. 56). The small purposive sample allowed the full possibility of this research method to emerge.

**Data Collection Plan**

All participants in the study were given an IRB-approved letter of informed consent. This was the first step of the data collection process. The academic leaders were encouraged to share their sensemaking of their lived experiences in the role and their perceptions of the factors that influenced their leadership effectiveness. Conducting the semi-structured interviews served a dual purpose, expanding research for better identifying the different components of the leadership style these academic professionals implemented, and collecting their feedback that can prove valuable for development of future leaders (Avolio et al., 1999). Larkin et al. (2006) recommended that a researcher conducting an IPA analysis should have two goals when collecting data: the first goal is to get a clear understanding of their participants’ experience and to describe it; and the second goal is to conduct an interpretative analysis placing the participants’ description in the context, from the cultural, social and theoretical perspective (p. 104).

Smith (2011) suggested that in order to collect detailed data from the study’s participants, the researcher should consider conducting “in-depth, semi-structured interviews” (p. 10). This attention to detail for each participant’s personal account requires that each interview is “transcribed verbatim,” and this process generates an intense activity for each account, and as a result, a small sample size is sufficient “for the potential of IPA to be realized” (p. 10). Gill (2015) underlined the central role that intentionality plays in conducting an IPA study, and he concluded that study participants are not able to separate the emotions triggered by their lived
experiences, from what they experienced. To find out the meaning of the specific experiences of the participants, open-ended questions were asked during the interviews, seeking for the understanding of the specific experience, and without trying to predetermine or presume the role of the specific emotions experienced by the participants (Gill, 2015).

To protect the anonymity of the participants and their institutions, a pseudonym was used for each participant. The participants’ approval to record all the interviews was obtained prior to beginning of each interview to ensure the data collected during each interview was gathered to the greatest level of detail and to avoid missing of any nuances in the participant’s answers. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, including any space fillers used by participants when they answer the questions. Their answers were described as accurately and detailed as possible, including the body language used by the participants when they provided their answers. While recording the interviews, a data recording protocol was implemented. Creswell (2015) defined the interview protocol as serving a dual purpose; it reminds the researcher of all the questions that have to be asked during the interview, and also it provides them “a means for recording notes” (p. 224). Conducting the semi-structured interviews with each participant helped in providing a rich data collection to support the study.

**Data Analysis Plan**

Once the data was collected, and the interviews were transcribed, the transcripts were reviewed to avoid any errors or omissions. The transcripts were forwarded to each participant, and they were asked to review them and confirm the accuracy of their answers as reflected on the transcript. The participants were asked to verify their answers to make sure they are comfortable with the measures implemented to protect their anonymity, for example, a pseudonym was used to protect their identity, different names were used for initiatives they shared that were specific to
their institution, and the name of their institution was not used. The central steps of data analysis included coding data into meaningful segments, combining the codes into themes, and the themes were grouped in superordinate themes. The data were analyzed in great details, and it was illustrated through generating graphs, tables, and charts (Creswell, 2013). Creswell’s model was implemented during the data analysis for this study, and that includes the five steps of the analytic process, such as organizing the data, reading and writing memos, describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes, interpreting the data, and representing and visualizing it (Creswell, 2013). Rubin and Rubin (2012) described the process of coding as finding and labeling the concepts, themes, events, and examples in the interview transcripts that speak to the study’s research questions.

Miles et al. (2004) described the First Cycle coding as a way to initially summarize segments of data collected through the interviews. Pattern coding, as a Second Cycle method, is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs. Pattern coding has four important functions: 1) condensing large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units; 2) keeping the researcher focused on the analysis process; 3) helping the researcher elaborate a cognitive map; [and] 4) laying the groundwork for cross-case analysis (p. 96).

The data collected during the interviews, were initially coded manually, and for the second round of the coding, the NVivo software was adopted. Using the software allowed for an easier grouping of the codes in clusters and identifying the themes. Based on a preliminary analysis, the codes were grouped into clusters to identify the main themes in the data collected when the interviews were conducted. During the codes’ analysis phase, a jotting system was used to add detailed notes to the codes.
Implementing the IPA method for this study allowed a focus on the participants’ personal meaning of their experiences and their sensemaking of these experiences and not on the experience itself (Larkin et al., 2006). The main advantages of applying the IPA methodology when analyzing the data was that it allowed for an analysis of the themes for each participant, find the common themes across all participants to the study, and most importantly, “to properly explore, understand and communicate the experiences and viewpoints offered by its participants” (p. 103).

Smith et al. (2009) outlined a guideline consisting of six steps for the data analysis phase that should take place when conducting an IPA. These steps are listed below:

1. Reading and re-reading: The researcher immerses themselves in the data they collected by reading and re-reading the transcripts, listening to the interview recordings, so the participants “becomes the focus of the analysis” (p. 82).

2. Initial noting: this step is considered to be taking a significant amount of time since it is very detailed consisting of analyzing the participant’s vocabulary, language, and semantics at a very exploratory level.

3. Developing emergent themes: even though the transcripts of the interview take the center stage for the data collected, data are expanded considerably by adding the notes based on exploring the participants’ answers. Identifying emerging themes requires analyzing smaller segments and breaking down the transcripts into smaller parts. The themes reflect the participant’s description of their experience and the researcher’s sensemaking of this description. This process reflects the hermeneutics of IPA and consists of the description done by the participants and the interpretation reached by the researcher.
4. Searching for connections across emergent themes: The emergent themes are listed in chronological order as they were identified. There are various methods for identifying the relations between emerging themes, such as: a) abstraction consisting of grouping themes in clusters; b) contextualization consisting of illustrating the narrative elements that can be dispersed throughout the transcripts; c) numeration consists in identifying the frequency of the emergent themes throughout the transcripts; and d) function requires identifying the role of the emergent themes throughout the transcripts.

5. Moving to the next case requires bracketing the findings of the analysis of the first interview and proceeding to the next and treating it as a stand-alone case without allowing the findings to influence this next step.

6. Looking for patterns across cases consists of identifying patterns across participants’ answers, finding connections in the transcripts from different interviews, and determining if a theme from one interview can support the findings from another set of transcripts.

Smith et al. (2009) emphasized that even though the IPA is in all instances interpretative, there are various “levels to that interpretation” (p. 103) and especially inexperienced researchers are too cautious and as a result, their analysis are too descriptive.

Using the NVivo software provided the opportunity to calculate the frequency of the codes and allowed for an easier process of grouping the codes in clusters per categories. During the data analysis phase, identifying different categories based on codes and subcodes and grouping the codes per themes proved to be beneficial for achieving reliable outcomes for this study. Seidman (2006) recommendation for researchers to avoid in-depth analysis until all scheduled interviews were completed, was followed, so the tendency to form premature
conclusions and impose them on the data generation during the interviewing process was minimized.

**Considerations of Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (2007) listed four criteria that are usually applied for testing the rigor of a study: 1) internal validity is the criteria that explores inquiry’s evaluation or its value; 2) the external validity or generalizability, is the criteria that determines the study’s applicability; 3) reliability or replicability is the criteria that determines the study’s consistency; and 4) objectivity is the criteria evaluating the study’s neutrality. These researchers suggested implementing the four analog factors different from the regular factors above listed. The analog factors are the following: 1) credibility instead of internal validity; 2) transferability similar to external validity; 3) dependability in lieu of reliability; and 4) confirmability as the analog of objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

Shenton (2004) listed four criteria necessary for ensuring trustworthiness of a study, and he supported the four criteria as they were constructed by Guba (1981), such as: a) credibility as investigators prove that the phenomenon studied is described accurately; b) transferability allowing the study’s findings to be applied in other fields; c) dependability allowing for the study to be replicated by other researchers; and d) confirmability demonstrating that the study’s findings are a result of the data collected and not the researcher’s predispositions.

These three different approaches were discussed to identify the common criteria listed by two different scholars. To ensure trustworthiness of the current study and ensure its rigor, the four criteria listed both in Shenton’s and Guba’s approach were implemented. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, and the steps implemented to ensure these criteria were met are presented below.
Trustworthiness

Shenton (2004) stated that when qualitative studies are conducted, there is a reluctance to accept their trustworthiness, even though frameworks were developed to ensure the rigor of the research conducted. The scholar emphasized the important role of the advisors in ensuring that their advisees are implementing steps to guarantee the trustworthiness of their qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). The main reason for questioning the trustworthiness of the studies using a qualitative methodology, is because the study’s “validity and reliability” (p. 63) cannot be verified using in a concrete and precise system (Shenton, 2004).

Credibility

Credibility of this study is ensured by the implementation of several steps, including the adoption of a well-established research method (IPA); the understanding of the culture of the organizations of the participants; the objective selection of the participants to the study; the triangulation of data from interviews; and using tactics to ensure accurate and honest responses from participants. The research design implemented the recommendations made by Shenton (2004) to set up regular debriefing sessions, to generate a thick description of the phenomenon that is studied, and to review the findings of prior studies to determine if the results of the current study are aligned with older findings.

Transferability

Transferability is determined by the ability to apply the study’s findings in other contexts. Shenton (2004) considered that it is the researcher’s responsibility to provide to their readers enough contextual background of the study, so that they can decide to transfer the study’s findings to their respective contexts. Lincoln and Guba (2007) recommended generating thick descriptive data by developing a narrative for the context of the study, so that other researchers
can determine the degree of fit or similarity interested in applying some of the findings outside the study. The knowledge generated by this study is expected to help future academic leaders identify the leadership behaviors, traits, and capabilities they can implement to increase their leadership effectiveness in leading their teams and departments in the new world of the higher education of the 21st century.

**Dependability**

Shenton (2004) described dependability of a study as obtaining similar results as the initial results of a study, if the research would be repeated applying the same research method, in the same context, and using the same participants. Lincoln and Guba (2004) recommended that the researcher ensures that a neutral auditor, expert in the field of the study conducts an audit of the study. To ensure dependability of this IPA study, an internal audit is conducted by an auditor with tenure in higher education.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability of a study can be ensured by the researcher by showing that the study’s findings are based on interpreting the data collected from participants, and they are not the researcher’s preferences (Shenton, 2004). This can be achieved by applying a process of tracing the research every step of the way defined as an “audit trail” (p. 72). This process can be illustrated in two diagrams. The first is taking a data-oriented approach by describing the data gathering and the process of reaching the study’s recommendations, and the second is the theoretical audit trail listing the ideas that triggered the research questions (Shenton, 2004). For this study, a chain of evidence is generated to demonstrate that the findings of this study were based on analyzing and interpreting the feedback provided by the study’s participants. Shenton (2004) recommended the researcher recognizes the shortcomings of the methods implemented in
the study, and includes the potential impacts and effects these shortcomings can have on the study.

**Summary and Conclusions**

The main purpose of this IPA study was to explore the leadership behaviors and lived experiences of academics executives in higher education institutions and their sensemaking of the elements that influenced their leadership effectiveness, so that they can add to the body of knowledge on what is needed for emerging and future leaders. Knowledge generated by this study is expected to help newly appointed leaders in higher education understand better the positive influences on their transformational leadership style and overall on their leadership effectiveness so that they can better fulfill their role and responsibilities as catalysts for change and transformation at their institutions.

To collect rich data to support the study, a qualitative inquiry was used to ensure that the participants’ experiences were reflected as described by participants who lived them in specific contexts, and the findings were formulated in similar terms as the language used by the participants when they described their lived experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). Eight senior academic leaders were recruited to participate in a purposive sampling approach using the IPA research protocols of conducting “in-depth, semi-structured, interviews” (Smith, 2011, p. 10). All participants were identified only with a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of the participants and their institutions; all interviews were recorded to gather data to the greatest level of detail and transcribed verbatim. During the data analysis for this study, Creswell’s model of the five steps of the analytic process was implemented, including organizing the data, reading and writing memos, describing, classifying and interpreting data into codes and themes, interpreting the data and representing and visualizing it (Creswell, 2013).
Also, the six steps for IPA data analysis were utilized as outlined by Smith et al. (2009), including: 1) reading and re-reading the transcripts; 2) initial noting on the transcripts; 3) developing emerging themes; 4) searching for connections across emergent themes; 5) treating each interview as a stand-alone case by bracketing the findings of the analysis for each interview; and 6) identifying patterns across cases and finding connections between different transcripts to determine if a theme from one interview supports the findings from other transcripts.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter of the thesis presents the findings identified during the analysis of the data collected while conducting semi-structured interviews with eight academic leaders at four-year private or public colleges located in the Northeastern region of the United States. The main purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis study was to explore the leadership behaviors and lived experiences of academic executives in higher education institutions and their perception and sensemaking of the influences on their leadership effectiveness in their role. The main research question that guided this study was: How do today’s academic leaders of higher education institutions perceive and make sense of their experience as leaders?

The Data Collection

This section of Chapter Four describes the steps completed during data collection including: identifying the participants and the channels used to recruit the potential participants; establishing the communication channels; and describing the steps that were taken to conduct the semi-structured interviews for collecting of the data. This section also includes the participants’ profiles.

Identifying and Recruiting the Participants

Various channels were used to identify potential participants to this study, including the primary resource of the professional social media tool, the LinkedIn platform. LinkedIn is a social media tool that enabled identification and networking with potential prospective participants (Hubert, 2014). LinkedIn is considered to be, after voicemail and internet, one of the most useful “technology tools ever invented,” with the professional’s profiles being considered the “equivalent of a billboard” listing their professional experience (Hubbard, 2014, p. 32).

To determine if the candidates met the selection criteria outlined in Chapter Three and in the Institutional Review Board application, their LinkedIn profiles were reviewed. These
selection criteria included: tenure of a minimum eight years in a senior academic role; holding of a terminal degree; and currently in an executive role at a four-year college or university, public or private, based in the Northeastern region of the United States. Once the potential participants to the study were identified, they were contacted using the Northeastern e-mail account and a recruitment flyer approved by IRB was sent to them. This was sent to the work email, including an edu domain, proving it belonged to an education institution, or as provided by them when they were contacted, or their email as found on their institution’s website.

**The Interviewing Process**

When communication was established and the prospective participants showed interest for participating in the study, a phone screening took place to determine if the potential participants maintained their interest in the study once the data collection process was explained to them in greater detail. An appointment was set for the first interview with each participant, at a time and location that was most convenient for them. Prior to starting the interview, the participants were presented with an IRB-approved letter of informed consent. After the document was explained and it was signed, the data collection process was initiated, and the first interview was conducted.

As per Smith’s (2011) recommendations, “in-depth, semi-structured interviews” were conducted for detailed data collection (p. 10). Three participants were interviewed in person in their office, since this location was most convenient for them. The rest of the interviews were conducted either by phone or they were web-based, either due to the location of the participants that did not allow for an in-person meeting or the preference of the participant to discuss by phone. One participant was based out of state; three participants were located within a considerable distance from New York City, and another participant was based within driving
distance; however, her preference was interviewing by phone. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Several interviews were transcribed manually; however, the majority of the interviews were transcribed using an AI tool, a transcription software, Temi, which is “an automated speech recognition engine” (Mateos, 2019, p. 10). The open-ended questions that were asked during the interviews were useful in collecting thick details on the meaning of the specific experiences of the participants. They were helpful for understanding their sensemaking of the experiences that they shared during the interviews.

Before starting the interview process, the participants’ approval to record the interview was requested and obtained. The purpose of this step of the data collection was to ensure that the data shared by participants during the interview had been collected at an extraordinary level of detail and to avoid omission of any nuance in the participant’s answers. During the interviews, an interviewing protocol was used. Creswell (2015) described the interview protocol as serving a dual purpose: reminding the researcher of all the questions included in the interview script and providing them “a means for recording notes” (p. 224). While conducting the semi-structured interviews with each participant, rich data was collected in support of this study.

**Participant Demographics**

As recommended by the IPA methodology, the sample of the eight participants in this study was small. This provided an opportunity to conduct a thorough analysis of their answers, by giving full appreciation of each participant’s recollection of their experiences in their role, and their perceptions of the factors that influenced them (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

As per the IPA guidelines, the sample of the participants selected for this study was purposive and homogenous, since they shared similar professional experiences considering the high level of specificity of their roles, duties, and responsibilities (Gill, 2015). The homogenous
sample criteria is achieved when the participants to the study share a specific set of professional characteristics (Creswell, 2015). The sample included senior academic leaders with at least eight years of experience in the following roles, Provosts, Assistant Provosts, Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs, Deans of Academic Affairs, Chief Academic Officers (CAO) at four-year public or private colleges and universities from the Northeastern region of the United States.

Although a balance of gender and an ethnically diverse sample of participants was desired to reflect the potential population of academic leaders, it turned out that the sample has included predominantly White professionals, with one African American. It also included five women and three men. The majority of the participants were based in New York, with one participant being based in Pennsylvania. A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participants and of their current institution. Table 5 includes a summary of the demographic data, the tenure, the location and the career path of the participants in this study.
Table 5

*Summary of Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Current Role</th>
<th>Career Pathway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>State University</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Executive Dean</td>
<td>Consultant Teaching Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>Private College</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Associate Provost</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>Private College</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Chief Academic Officer</td>
<td>Nursing Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Over 8 years</td>
<td>Private College</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Executive Dean</td>
<td>P-12 Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>Private College</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Executive Dean</td>
<td>Nurse / Nurse Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>State University</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Chief Academic Officer</td>
<td>Clinical Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Over 10 years</td>
<td>Private College</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>Psychology Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Over 8 years</td>
<td>State University</td>
<td>NY</td>
<td>VP of Academic Affairs</td>
<td>Music Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participant Profiles

The following participant profiles are presented to illustrate the characteristics of each participant, their career pathways, their career distinctions, and key motivators.

Participant - Howard. Howard is the Dean of the Graduate School at a 4-year private College in New York. The graduate school he is overseeing is one of the largest educator preparation programs in the New York region and the largest provider of Special Education teachers for the New York City Department of Education (NYDOE). Howard holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership, a Master’s degree in Applied Linguistics, and a Bachelor’s degree in Spanish.

Howard started his career as a teacher in P-12, and his career progressed as he continued his own education. He has fond memories of being a teacher in secondary education, and he still applies, when needed, the teaching skills he developed during that time in his career. As his teaching career shifted to become a faculty member in higher education, he was an active member of several committees overseeing development of new programs, obtaining or renewing accreditation, and improving curriculum effectiveness.

Accountability is an important measure for Howard and his colleagues’ professional accomplishments. After being a faculty member for a few years and purposefully observing various administrators in their roles, Howard decided to pursue an administrative role in higher education. During his tenure, he held various different roles in different regions of the country, which helped him build a certain resilience that comes with experience and exposure to various environments and organizational cultures.

Participant - Joanne. Joanne had a dual role as an administrator and academic dean overseeing a Center for Teaching at a 4-year university in Pennsylvania for almost 13 years. By
training, she is an archeologist, and she has a Ph.D. in anthropology. Joanne has been in the field of faculty training and developing for more than 20 years.

Having a dual title, academic and administrative, allows Joanne to interact with academics and with administrative staff. Her areas of expertise pertain to teaching and diversity in the STEM domain. She is promoting the integration of active and engaging learning in teaching in traditional context and organizational leadership.

Joanne is passionate to help future teachers and next-generation faculty to develop professionally and to find their vocation in teaching.

**Participant - Miriam.** Miriam is an Associate Provost and the Director for Teaching and Learning at a 4-year private college in New York. She is a biologist by training, and her educational background consists of a Bachelor’s degree in Biology, a Master’s Degree in Teaching, and a Ph.D. in Biology. Miriam has received multiple awards throughout her career in academics, and she has been assisting the faculty since 1993 and working with them on teaching and learning.

Miriam’s role includes overseeing the Academic Affairs function by helping develop new programs, co-chairing the accreditation process, and managing the online learning division of her college. Miriam also leads the Center of Teaching and Learning at her college, monitoring faculty learning and development. The College library falls under her supervision, and there are three Library directors who report to Miriam. She is also leading the Career Services Department. All of these activities give Miriam, a broad scope in her academic affairs portfolio.

Miriam’s areas of interest include encouraging active learning, the use of student teams in the classroom, mentoring faculty members, and online and blended learning.
Participant - Mary. Mary is currently overseeing the Academic Affairs function at a 4-year, private college in New York. Her educational background includes a Bachelor’s degree, a Master’s of Science, and a terminal degree in Nursing. Mary also completed a graduate certificate in Higher Education Leadership from Harvard University.

Mary’s career advanced as she transitioned to more senior administrative roles. Prior to her current role at the NY college, she held the chief academic officer position for more than 13 years at a college in Connecticut. She has served in several leadership roles and was a member of the Board of Directors for several professional, non-profit associations.

Mary is passionate about creating something that lives beyond her tenure in her role. Under her leadership, her College is growing at a record pace, increasing its student population, and adding new programs.

Participant - Sue. Sue is an Executive Dean at a four-year private college, located in New York. Sue’s education consists of a Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree, and a terminal degree in Nursing. Sue has completed a three-year fellowship training that was “transformational” for her. Sue has a long tenure in higher education. She was the Founding Dean of the Nursing Division of the College. She is currently overseeing the School of the Health and Human Services of her current college.

Sue has shared her scholarship in multiple publications and speaks nationally on various issues related to the nursing field, and she is a big advocate for the implementation of formal leadership training at the undergraduate level. She has made it her mission “before she retires,” to provide opportunities for nurses, whatever role they currently hold in the healthcare environment, to receive access to leadership developmental education.
Sue believes that leadership training and development is usually provided in the later part in one’s career, after they have already been appointed to a leadership role. She wants to change this trend by advocating for leadership development to take place early in a professional’s career.

**Participant - Jessica.** Jessica is the Provost and Vice President of the Academic Services at a college that is part of the system of the State University of New York. In her role as the college chief academic officer, she is overseeing the faculty, curriculum, and academic programs for the college. Her educational background consists of a Bachelor of Science in Biology, a Master’s of Science, and a Doctorate in Microbiology. Her career started over 20 years ago as a faculty member, and after a few years of teaching, she transitioned to healthcare administration, and clinical management.

Jessica returned to higher education, and her career progressed from being a tenured professor to taking on administrative roles. She currently oversees Academics Services at a College located in New York, and her responsibilities include overseeing the academic programs, leading the faculty, and managing curriculum development for the College. Her administrative experience includes institutional and programmatic accreditation, distance and online education, and adult learning continuous education programs. Jessica has experience in science, technology, teaching, administration, and leadership, and she earned titles and awards acknowledging her important contributions as a research fellow, professor, and administrator.

Jessica is passionate for making a difference and helping “so many students to become successful potentially even for the first time.” This is a powerful motivator for her, and she is aware of the impact education has on students, their families, and communities they live in.

**Participant - Andrew.** Andrew is currently overseeing Academic Affairs at a 4-year private college in New York. He has held other similar roles as an assistant provost and provost.
at several colleges in the New York area. His educational background includes a Bachelor’s degree, and a Master’s of Science, and a terminal degree in Psychology.

Andrew is the co-author of two books, and he has written chapters of several psychology books. He is a member of various professional associations and participates as a board member at a non-profit organization. Early in his career, he participated in a fellowship program that proved to be an “amazing learning opportunity,” allowing him to enhance his leadership skills in higher education.

He believes in creating a generally supportive, relaxed, and comfortable work environment, and he makes sure that people feel valued and empowered, enjoy each other, and work together to meet both their individual and organizational goals.

**Participant - John.** John currently holds a senior executive role overseeing Academic Affairs at a 4-year State College located in New York. His educational background consists of a Bachelor’s Degree in Music Education, a Master’s Degree in Applied Music, and he holds a terminal degree in Music Education. John started his career more than 35 years ago as a music teacher, and his passion for music and teaching came through during his recollections of that time in his career. He has taught classes with more than 150 students at a time, and as he shared during his interviews, even now in his current administrative role, he is still applying pedagogy principles.

John is also a recognized musician. He has frequently attended concerts as a featured artist and held leading roles in a few international committees and music chambers. John is based now in the New York area, after he had several administrative assignments at colleges based in different regions of the country, such as Florida, Nebraska, and Mississippi. John is leading with a strong passion for helping people, bringing them together, and bringing out the best in them.
The Data Analysis

This IPA study explored the sensemaking experience of academic officers of their leadership effectiveness and the influencers on it. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the main purpose to collect rich information and details on the participants’ understanding of their experiences, as they shared them in first-person narratives.

For the initial data analysis, the Creswell’s model was implemented, which includes organizing the data, reading and writing memos, describing, classifying and interpreting data into codes and themes, interpreting the data, and representing and visualizing it (Creswell, 2013). Analyzing the data was a complex and thorough activity, which was completed with the goal to become immersed in the data and to make sense of the participants’ understanding and sensemaking of their experiences in their roles. First, each transcript was reviewed to take note of the participant demographics and to discern how the participant made sense of their role as an academic leader during a period of change and transition. The transcripts were read and re-read numerous times, and the recordings were listened to multiple times. That helped in taking a deeper dive into the researching material, recollecting the interview set-up, and recalling the dynamic of the interview. This proved to be helpful for identifying the descriptive and conceptual statements shared by the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Using an IPA approach, the data were analyzed using a multiple-step process and the six steps as included in the IPA guideline by Smith et al. (2009) were followed. The steps are listed below:

- Reading and re-reading the transcripts, and listening to the interview recordings, multiple times when it was needed to ensure the full understanding of the nuances shared by participants.
• Initial noting: this step proved to be very useful in detailing the participant’s feedback at an exploratory level.

• Developing emergent themes: this step required analyzing smaller segments of the transcripts. The themes reflected the description of participants’ experience as they provided it during the interviews, and the researcher’s understanding of this description. This step confirms the hermeneutics aspect of the IPA since it includes the description provided by each participant and the researcher’s interpretation.

• Seeking connections between the emergent themes. The emergent themes were listed in the chronological order as they were identified. The method applied for identifying the relations between the emerging themes was the numeration, which consists in identifying the frequency of the emergent themes throughout the transcripts. The frequency was determined using the NVivo software.

• Each participant was considered a stand-alone case, and the findings for each participant were bracketed to prevent influencing the next step of the data analysis.

• Identifying patterns across participants’ answers, helped in determining if a theme from one interview can support the findings from another set of transcripts by identifying connections in separate transcripts from different interviews.

The data analysis included transcribing the interviews verbatim. Each transcript was printed, and as they were reviewed, annotations were made on the right-hand side of the page. This phase of making annotations, or writing memos, helped in becoming deeply familiar with each participant and making sense as they were trying to sensemake of their experience (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The data were initially coded manually, and the transcripts were fragmented into smaller paragraphs for analysis, with each page divided in three columns. On
the left side, there was the transcribed text; in the second column, the preliminary codes were generated using the same words used by the participants during the interviews, as they gained special significance during the analysis; and the third column included the final codes reflecting the interpretation of the researcher (Saldana, 2009). This is part of the hermeneutics phase of the IPA, when the understanding of the participant’s perceptions takes place, and “an insider’s perspective” is gained (Smith & Osborne, 2015, p. 79).

For the second phase of coding the data, the NVivo software was used, and even though this “software does not analyze or interpret data in itself;” it provided several options to make these steps more efficient (Silver & Lewins, 2014, p. 19). For example, it allowed for automatic generation of tables listing the frequency of codes by file, number of words, and references. The tables were easily exported to spreadsheets that allowed for data sorting, filtering, and statistical analysis. The software provided mapping tools allowing for visual connections, such as patterns or links between data. Queries were easy to run and rerun, contributing to conducting an inductive analysis and to the “incremental coding process” (p. 22). The inductive analysis of the data “facilitates a broader understanding of the perceived effects” as they were described by participants (West et al., 2016). Throughout the data analysis, numerous printings were done, such as reports of the codes, summaries of the frequencies of the codes, and the lists of the codes.

The codes were grouped into nodes based on the frequency and the number of references as determined after sorting them with the software. Once the NVivo nodes were identified, the next step was to identify emerging themes through the process of printing colored charts, going back to the basic and using colored pencils and markers to group the nodes based on the links identified between them. The data were then compared and analyzed by creating visual models
by creating bar graphs, tables, charts, and diagrams. Visualizing the data helped with the grouping of the clusters into emerging themes (Silver & Lewins, 2017). Sorting the emerging themes based on their relationships with the specific topic helped to identify and define the superordinate and subordinate themes. The emerging themes were clustered together into superordinate themes, while the subordinate themes remained nested within the superordinate themes. There were three superordinate themes, and each of them included several subordinate themes. This list was revisited and revised several times. Some of the subordinate themes were dropped since they were not a good fit with the scaffolding of the study’s conceptual structure as it was taking shape.

**Key Themes that Emerged from the Data Analysis**

Based on the data analysis process presented in the prior section, three superordinate themes were determined as representative of the material collected. Each theme is listed and explained, and it is associated with the respective subordinate themes that were clustered during the analysis. For easier reference, the superordinate and subordinate themes are listed in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Superordinate and Subordinate Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superordinate</th>
<th>Subordinate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a Leader</td>
<td>1A. Transitioning to Leader from Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1B. Enhancing Leadership through Training and Observing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1C. Being Reflective and Self-Aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a Leader</td>
<td>2A. Building Relationships Based on Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2B. Giving People a Voice and Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2C. Valuing and Supporting People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership for Sustainability</td>
<td>3A. Responding to Market Forces Triggering Intense Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3B. Sustainable Leadership Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3C. Communicating and Sharing Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3D. Shifting the Thinking for Transformation</td>
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Superordinate Theme #1: Becoming a Leader

The first superordinate theme, as it emerged from the analysis of the data, reflected aspects of the experience of the participants as they were becoming leaders. The participants believed they always had certain leadership traits at the core. Some of the participants shared that they did not pursue a leadership role intentionally. Advancing their careers to leadership positions, all the way to C-Suite roles, was fueled by their passion to help people, their desire to bring their teams together, and to help their followers deliver their best performance. The participants shared that this process included formal and informal training, observing either their leaders or their peers in similar or aspirational roles, and reflecting upon the feedback they received on their performance in the role. As a result of their supplementing their core leadership traits, they had the opportunity to advance in their roles with experience. Their leadership development became a natural progression from the roles they had earlier in their careers.

The subordinate themes clustered within Becoming a Leader are: Transitioning to Leader from Teacher; Enhancing Leadership through Training and Observing; and Being Reflective and Self-Aware.

Transitioning to leader from teacher. Several of the participants acknowledged that early in their careers they did not think of themselves as leaders. All of the participants in the study were administrators in higher education with years of teaching experience. The skills they gained during their teaching years stayed with them as their career progressed. For example, John shared that he never stopped applying his teacher’s skills. As his career advanced and he took on administrative roles, he acknowledged that he remained a teacher all his life. He continued to apply the skills he learned as a teacher, as this was important to him.
Miriam mentioned that she knew with certainty that she didn’t “set out to be a leader.” However, she admitted that she enjoys helping people, and she “enjoyed coaching and mentoring people.” Miriam began her career as a faculty member and, as she became more comfortable in her teaching role, she “started doing educational development work.”

Mary began her career as a faculty member, and she was passionate about improving the outcomes of her teaching. She took on extra responsibilities, often engaging in leadership tasks, such as assessing the curriculum, conducting analysis, seeking to increase the curriculum effectiveness. Her role expanded in time “more organically” as she became a course leader. While she was successful in taking on and completing leadership-oriented assignments and tasks, she admitted, “There was a lot of satisfaction,” in doing that.

Andrew confirmed that he did not pursue an academic leadership role intentionally, since early in his career he “hadn't contemplated administrative roles in higher education.” He had a tendency to “naturally taken leadership roles in college, in graduate school, in various committees or initiatives,” and this was the foundation he based his future decisions to accept leadership roles as his career advanced.

John’s passion to help people work together is what drew him to academic leadership. He shared that he had “always been interested in bringing people together.” He always wanted to help his team members achieve things together that they could not have achieved by themselves, as he described it, “It’s what got me into it [becoming a leader] in the very beginning.” When the demands of his administrative role did not allow him to continue teaching, he reluctantly accepted. He shared during the interviews, “In the long run, as my career continued, I realized that I am a teacher every day, and I’ve never stopped.” He noted that even now in his current role as a provost at a college, he gets the opportunity to apply his teaching skills by explaining to his
colleagues the role of the Academics Affairs at the College. He shared that “if I look at my
career over such a long time [over 35 years], I think that the constant, for me, has been
remaining, keeping the frame, of being a teacher.”

John considered that the frame as a teacher enabled him to think through “the faculty
lens” also, not only through the administrator’s lens when he made decisions in his current role.
His professional foundation as a teacher was a constant reminder of the “importance of the role
of the faculty,” and helped him to get things done and “bring people along.” At this point in his
career, John believed that his role is “much more foundational than it has ever been,” by focusing
on the effect he can have on the future leaders who have a long career ahead of them, by
mentoring and hosting training for them.

Sue was the only participant who shared that she knew that she wanted to be in charge
early in her career. She is confident that she is a successful leader, and she has implemented what
she feels is a “highly effective” leadership style. She shared that she achieves her goals as a
leader as well as the organizational goals, and she always does what she committed to, and that
has made her a successful leader.

Joanne deliberately chose the administration path versus the “tenure-line pathway” for
her career. Her main reason for making this decision was that she could “have a far greater
impact by working with faculty and graduate students from all disciplines than [she] could ever
have through research and teaching,” in her discipline. Once she became a director and took on a
leadership role, she realized that she was a “good administrator and leader.”

Howard considered an administrative role after being a faculty member for a few years,
and he was encouraged to do so by the people who were close to him, who noticed his leadership
traits. He stated that he operates with the guidelines that once a professional agrees to join an
organization, they are representing that organization, and they become its stewards, uplifting the mission and the values of their institution. Either they are members of the faculty or members of the administration, they will always be a leader. He stated that for each role in an organization, there are deliverables and functions associated with it and that professionals should think about their work as the value it adds both to the organization and its constituents. They should be committed to leave the organization in a better state than it was when they first joined it.

Howard shared that even though he has the role of an administrator with different responsibilities than teaching, he kept top of mind his teacher’s mission. In his current role, he is still teaching his colleagues how to formulate the correct questions, he is helping them to understand better how to use and apply the data, and he is encouraging them to continuously improve their programs. There were times in his roles as an administrator when he had to go back to his role of a “second-grade teacher,” and throughout his career, he has implemented the skills he had previously acquired as a teacher. Howard believed that “first and foremost, even though I am an administrator, I am a faculty member.” He considered himself “a scholar and one who contributes to the profession,” since he sees himself “steep[ed] in the profession.”

Miriam shared that she started her career as a professor. What motivated her throughout her career was working with faculty members. She enjoyed helping them to develop their teaching skills and achieve their own success.

**Summary.** In summary, most of the participants recognized that when they started their careers, they did not seek intentionally to reach an executive level of leadership. Their desire to help people, to coach and mentor professionals, and to bring people together, set their career path to reach their current roles of administrators in higher education. Most of them started their
career as teachers, and the skills they gained during their teaching years stayed with them throughout their career.

**Enhancing leadership skills through training and observing.** The role played by the formal and informal training in the participants’ career was mentioned by most of the participants during the interviews. Joanne mentioned that completing training throughout various stages in her career helped her change her perspectives on leadership. Jessica mentioned that during her training, she completed various assessments that helped her identify her strengths and “weaknesses so that [she] could lead with the strength and shore up the weaknesses.” She believed training to be a great opportunity, and it proved to be “transformational in getting [her] to where [she is] today.”

Sue was convinced that more intentional training early on in a leader’s career would be beneficial. She attended a leadership development program that was “transformational.” She is a strong believer in intentional and intensive leadership training that should be taking place during a professional’s formative years. In her opinion, leadership training should take place “at every step of the way” in one’s career. She made it her mission to help nurses get easier access to formal leadership training. Howard takes a more systematic approach to training. He considered that to generate the best results from any training program, three similar training models should be evaluated, and their similarities and differences should be identified and analyzed.

Joanne shared that completing formal and informal training helped her change her “perceptions scale.” She found very useful the hands-on training, including the interactive parts of working with a coach, such as role-playing, or doing mock interviews. In her opinion, now in higher education "tenure[d] faculty who become good administrators is left largely to chance.” She was “confounded” by the fact that tenure was perceived by many faculty and academic
leaders as “a requirement for becoming an academic administrator.” Whereas, she believed that “people should be promoted into leadership positions based on their abilities, not their research pedigree.”

Mary shared that she did not go through much formal training for the leadership roles she held earlier in her career. She gained the needed skills by learning on the job, networking with peers from inside and outside her organization and consulting with them. She was aware that she has a “lot of drive for self-improvement.”

Andrew was recommended early in his role as a faculty department chair to become a fellow in a training program intended for higher education senior leaders. While he considered this could have been a “productive opportunity” for him, he was aware that he might need more tenure before he could be accepted into the program. Indeed, that was the case, and he had to wait one more year before he could re-apply, and he then was accepted into the program. This is a national program and consists of intense training, and once Andrew completed it, he considered that it was “a pretty amazing learning opportunity for higher education leadership” for him.

John mentioned that he is intentionally seeking different perspectives to form his own perspectives, and he constantly reaches out to his network whenever he needs an opinion, and he “asks them for it.” This has proven to be quite helpful for him over the years, as it was listening and watching other professionals in similar roles. He emphasized that he learned a lot in his career “by just observing, probably that’s the resource for me mostly.”

Joanne implemented a method to monitor her interactions in the workplace and developed the ability to observe herself, by trying to be an outsider watching her interaction between her and the person she is communicating with at the moment. She said that sometimes she is really good at it, and sometimes she is “terrible” at it. She is constantly working on her
delivery of the message she is sending. She is intentionally thinking of her delivery, and she uses reminders to be empathic in her email communication.

Howard mentioned that he is a “big observer of people.” Before being appointed to his current academic leadership role, he participated in several committees, where he had the opportunity to share his ideas on program effectiveness and efficiency. His ideas were “undergirded by the notion of innovation,” fairness, and equity-based on his understanding of the “needs of diverse constituents.”

He learned a lot by “observing and watching what people do,” and this is how he accumulated the experience that gave him the confidence to take on his first leadership role. He shared examples from earlier in his career when he was observing his prior leaders how to “do things efficiently.” He believed those were “critical incidences,” important for his leadership development. He considered himself “a study of the profession,” and his approach is observing people who are in the role. For example, he is observing the Provost or the President of the College to better understand the role, and he is networking within his professional community.

Miriam learned early in her career from one of her prior managers to observe each individual team member, identify their strengths, and balance all their different strengths, complementing each other to move the entire department forward. She observed how her Provost handled challenging situations and how he navigated through them. She also observed some of her prior leaders who were “terrible leaders,” and learned what not do to when she would have later been appointed to a similar role.

Mary shared that her organization is currently going through major changes, and she is leading this change with a team ranging from veterans to relatively new members. She is evaluating her leadership impact on her team by watching them coming together as a group. In
her opinion, based on how well her group is functioning as a team, working and making progress, is a measure of her effectiveness as their leader. This approach ripples out to a larger population that she is leading at the department and organizational level. She observes and evaluates, if the change is happening in an “organizational or meaningful way,” or if it is “random and chaotic.”

**Summary.** In summary, the formal and informal training and the intentional process of observing other professionals in similar roles was recognized by most participants as playing an important role, at times “transformational.” This helped them accumulate professional experience and getting the confidence to take on the responsibilities of a leadership role.

**Being reflective and self-aware.** Sue emphasized the importance for a leader to be self-reflective and open to their people’s feedback. She recalled that when she received negative feedback, she based her corrective actions on self-reflection and her ability to keep an open mind regarding the feedback that she received. Sue believed that a leader should evaluate what they “bring to the table,” and reflect on their contributions, especially when their outcome is not the desired one. She recommended that a leader must ponder and reflect upon the feedback that they receive, measure it against what they are already aware, and what they are not aware of.

Howard confirmed that he used a similar approach, mentioning that he was an advocate for self-reflection and that his organization supported this approach, “because we believe that if you cannot analyze yourself and analyze your work than you’re not going to be fully effective,” in the role. He believed that as a leader “you have to be reflective, you have to be seriously reflective.” Howard also recommended that the leader should be willing to openly discuss a contentious issue and not be afraid to ask questions and get more clarity, if required, to ensure a clear understanding of the issue “brought to the table” and that it is properly addressed.
When John receives feedback, he takes the time to seek to understand its framework. The main reason is to determine if it requires any adjustments or changes on his part. He mentioned his willingness and level of comfort in reflecting back to what he has said or done and rethink his approach, if needed.

Andrew mentioned that every time he receives feedback, he is reflecting on it to understand the source of it and the accurate context in which the provider of the feedback formed their impressions and perceptions. When he needs to take action on the feedback he received, he does it after he reflects on it, as he shared during the interviews, “I'm reflective about any feedback that I get.”

Mary realized that once she was able to reflect more on her accomplishments, her confidence level increased. She credited that to one of her mentors who helped her understand that her set of skills were solid enough, and that she did not have to constantly push herself to gain more knowledge. In her opinion, constant reflection should be a standard practice and a continuous process for a leader. She believes that to be able to allow the team members the opportunity to take their ideas to a different level and to present their solutions to the problems encountered by the team, “you have to constantly reflect on what it is that you are infusing into that situation.”

Most participants shared some of their strengths during the interviews, demonstrating that they were self-aware of their skills. Miriam mentioned that one of her strengths was her ability to communicate well. “One of my strengths is that I learned how to communicate with other people.” She experienced four different leadership styles since she worked with four different managers in a relatively short amount of time. She had to adjust her communication style to each of them to ensure that she was meeting her managers’ expectations.
Miriam stated that she makes sure she is always well-prepared for her meetings, and she shared “I'm type A, so I like to be prepared, and I like to be on time.” She always makes an intentional effort to communicate the information in a format that is easily understood by the receiver. She implemented a communication style that worked best for each of her managers. Miriam said that she is an example of a person with a high level of emotional intelligence (EQ). Miriam thinks that she has “a lot of emotional intelligence and I think that helps whether [the interaction is with people who are] below or above.”

Miriam also shared that she is sensitive. “I'm sensitive to other people to what they're feeling,” and she tries to connect with her team members at an emotional level, without necessarily displaying her emotions. She is aware that one thing she does well is facilitating and asking questions in a way that people do not take them personally, and they provide the answers to her by taking the time to think, and “thinking about it differently sometimes.” Miriam stated that she will not ask someone else to do anything that she is not willing to do.

She shared that even though she works really hard, she understands that people have a life outside the office. She considers herself a person with compassion, and she is always supportive of her team. She believes that she is someone who gets the job done positively and respected “across all levels of the institution.” In her current organization, she has gathered institutional history, yet her colleagues are aware that she is able to look forward.

Jessica believed that her ability to recognize the strengths of her team members as one of her own strengths. “I think one of the strengths I bring to my role is an interest in mentoring others, uh, and in finding the strengths in others.” She mentioned the same strength again later in the interview by sharing that she considered herself “a person who is astute about being able to figure out what other people's strengths are and to help them to find those strengths and grow
those strengths.” She was well aware of her strengths, and she described several of them clearly and in a very concise fashion, “I'm very consistent. I'm very clear. I'm very process oriented.”

Andrew considered himself as being a leader with a strong sense of passion and a high level of energy. He shared, “I'm an energetic leader.” He also believed that he had “a pretty good sense of humor,” allowing him to connect well with his team members and to keep them engaged, involved, and motivated. When referring to his tendency to seek continuous improvement, Andrew shared, “I've always had a— I think— a growth mindset.”

He is confident that he has a strong sense of vision and that he leads “with an eye always toward where we want to be going, not just maintaining the current status,” of the organization. Andrew shared that in the workplace when he thinks of his relationships with his team, he thought that he has a “pretty high degree of humanity.” He was aware that even though his standards are quite high, he has a “strong sense of interpersonal relatedness” and that could be misinterpreted as being soft at times.

Howard described his tendency to get involved by sharing, “I am on the ground, roll-up your sleeves person.” Even though he was relatively new at the current institution, with a little over a year in his current role, he thought that this trait helped him understand his team members, and as he shared, “I probably understand them better than folks that have been here for a while.” Howard shared that he is able to control his emotions, especially the negative ones. “I am not easy to panic.” He credited this ability to the fact that “because I am very hopeful,” and he considered himself being “a hopeful leader.” Howard reached a point in his career where, as a leader, he is happy about himself, and he reached an age and a level of experience that allow him to feel “more self-assured.”
While he is well aware of his strengths and weaknesses, he mentioned, “I am very clear about sort of what my strengths and areas that are not my strengths.” He is continuously learning and seeking what his limitations are in his new role. Howard shared that even though he likes people, he is not a “warm and fuzzy person.” Nonetheless, he finds himself often “concerned or worried” about the well-being of his team members. He has developed an ability to read their personalities, and he thought he has a “non-scientific work with energies.”

Mary mentioned that she knows her interactions with her team members are different than her predecessor. People are still adjusting to her communication style, which she defined it as “pretty straightforward.” She credited that to her learning and making sense style, “I deal with things at a very conceptual level, that’s how I interact with the world.” Mary shared that she is very aware of her ethical boundaries, and at this point in her career, she admitted that she is “very comfortable with the leader” that she became, stating that she is “willing to admit mistakes”, and she is “willing to change.” Mary thought that to meet the team goals, a leader must be able to meet their people where they are. To accomplish this, she admitted that as a leader “you have to be pretty clear about who you are, and you also have to be able to check your own ego.”

John mentioned that as a leader he is “very comfortable acknowledging” what he does not do well, or how he can “do better.” In his interactions, it is important for him to make sure people do not take anything personally, and he shared that he is “also comfortable debating with somebody.” John mentioned that it is important for him to know that there is a certain level of respect maintained at all times, since as he admitted, “I don’t have a lot of patience for disrespect, and I don’t have a lot of patience for people who are obstinate, just for the sake of
being obstinate.” He was aware that he is still working on accepting feedback without being defensive, and that was “sometimes harder than other times.”

Sue considered herself an outgoing leader, articulate, and most importantly a leader who delivered on her promises. She mentioned that she is sincere, and she was aware that she is fallible by having a temper, which she is working on. However, she was not always successful in doing so. Sue was aware that she could be “very direct,” and she tries to show confidence in almost all situations that require “real leadership skills.” She mentioned that she might not always feel confident, and because she was aware that people like a confident leader, she made sure to exude a high level of confidence at all times. Sometimes that caused the conversations to shut down, and she was aware of that and was working on changing this outcome.

**Summary.** In summary, most participants emphasized the importance for a leader to have the ability to be open and able to reflect and self-reflect on the feedback they receive from their followers, peers and managers. The willingness to change as a leader involves the ability to be self-reflective, to be self-aware of one’s skills, both weaknesses and strengths, and to be continuously learning and seeking what the limitations are in their current role.

**Summary and sensemaking of becoming a leader.** The data showed that most of the participants did not pursue their career advancement to a leadership role with intentionality and that they ascended into academic leadership roles through teaching. Their careers advanced to their current executive roles as a result of them following their passions to help people. They possess a strong desire to help their teams work better together and accomplish their goals. They wanted to help their followers to achieve their professional and organizational goals. Their core leadership traits helped them in seeking and materializing opportunities for advancing in their roles and careers.
Data analysis revealed that most participants perceived some emotional intelligence traits, such as self-awareness and self-reflection as essential for skill development, both their own and their teams. One participant demonstrated that she was self-aware, and she considered that as a leader she was able to identify her team’s skills and help people developing their skills. She described herself as, “a person who is astute about being able to figure out what other people’s strengths are and to help them to find those strengths and grow those strengths.” Another participant mentioned that as a leader “you have to be pretty clear about who you are,” and this perception was confirmed by another participant who shared that he was “very clear about of what [his] strengths, and areas that are not [his] strengths.”

As another participant mentioned, being aware of her strengths and weaknesses helped her “lead with the strength and shore up the weaknesses.” Another participant described one of her strengths, which at times had been perceived as a weakness, depending on the circumstances of the situation. As she described it, her interaction style was “forthright” and even though she worked on getting better at it, she still got “caught in it.” These are just a few examples of these senior leaders’ self-awareness and how they applied these skills in their current roles. The participants proved that they had solid self-awareness skills, since they were able to describe in detail both some of their strengths and weaknesses.

Based on most participants’ answers, training was important for enhancing their leadership skills. As the participants described, the training allowed them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, it was “transformational,” “an amazing opportunity,” and it changed their “perception scale.” One participant made it her mission to ensure that professionals have the opportunity to complete leadership training early in their careers. Most participants acknowledged how beneficial the process of observation was for the advancement of their
careers. Through observations, they learned, they evaluated their impact as leaders, they were able to determine if the organization is going through systematic versus chaotic change and to evaluate if their teams are functioning in a cohesive manner. The participants emphasized the importance for a leader to take the time to reflect on their actions, on their contributions, and if they need to correct course based on the feedback they receive. One of the participants stated that the higher education landscape is changing “every day.” As higher education is going through times of rapid change, the academic leaders understood the need to develop and master a set of skills and traits that positions them as catalysts for breakthrough change in their organization.

Superordinate Theme #2 Being a Leader

Most participants believed that being a leader is not about one’s skill set; it is, rather, about who the person is who has become a professional. Mary stated that leadership is “about being, being and becoming.” This superordinate theme, showed the intentionality of these academic executives to being the best leaders they could be. Once the participants were appointed in their roles, they sought opportunities to develop their leadership traits and to ensure that their set of professional skills allowed them to better serve their teams and organizations.

The subordinate themes clustered within Being a Leader are: Building Relationships Based on Trust; Giving People a Voice and Listening; and Valuing and Supporting People.

Building relationships based on trust. Jessica differentiated the way a leader earns the trust of their team. She stated that earning the trust of her team from a position of power, as a leader in a new organization, was more difficult than it was to build trust when her leadership role grew in a natural way as she moved up within her prior organization. It was difficult for her to understand and accept that there was no shortcut for earning people’s trust in her new organization. In her prior organization, she did not have to re-earn people’s trust once she was
appointed to a leadership role, since they knew who she was, and they had already established a trusting relationship. It took time for her to establish trusting relationships in the new organization, and she had to accept that there was no way to shorten that time since people’s trust had to be earned.

Jessica defined the relationships established within her team as easy going and not involving any fear. People are comfortable, and they trust that she will help them when they make any mistakes. She considered herself more of “a person who guides and corrects, than a person who's punitive at all.” She counted on them to be part of the team, and that was perceived as reaffirming and helped to solidify the trusting relationships they have within the team.

Jessica’s relationships with her peers are based now on “a lot more trust,” than they were in the past, and that generated a “lot more collaboration.” Thanks to this change in the dynamic of their professional relationships, even their leader, the President of the College, expressed her trust in her team. Jessica mentioned that in the past, the President was “suspicious,” when they were meeting without her, and now she is trusting them to work together to further her vision, and “to support her as she tries to move the institution forward.”

Jessica stated that “the most important thing” for her was the fact that her peers were trusting her. She knows they perceive her as “a trustworthy person, […] a person of integrity.” Jessica’s relationship with her direct manager was also based on trust, and this was extremely important for her. She stated, “Nothing means more to me than the fact she [the President of the College] trusts me to do my job.”

Mary emphasized how important it is for her to build good relationships with her direct and extended reports. She considered that they get along well, and that has a ripple effect on the larger population she is leading. She shared her openness to listen to their feedback, and she is
encouraging them to let her know “what’s really on their mind.” She gets energized by their enthusiasm and their engagement in the work they do together. This is how she gets the energy to continue in her role, taking the time to listen, “thinking of designing new strategies,” and trying on new things. Mary mentioned that it is very important for her to be honest with her team. She added that providing and receiving feedback is a constant process that “sometimes is easy, sometimes is not,” but it is a crucial component of the professional relationships they had established.

Sue made a few recommendations to implement for establishing relationships based on trust with their followers. Most importantly, to establish a trusting relationship, the leader has to always keep their promises, and to do what they “said they would do.” When people see that a leader kept their promise, they will trust them. Once a leader has their team’s trust, their team will be willing to accept that the leader is imperfect.

When he accepted his new role, it was crucial for Howard to know that the relationships he would establish at his new college will be based on trust. He made that clear in the final stages of the job interviewing process for his current role. He shared his aspirations with his future manager, by stating that if he cannot trust the people who he would “work with, those who I report to, and work with me, then it's not going to be a good fit.” He stated that when people trust that one is doing their job, they will not check on that professional. That does not mean that communication is lacking. On the contrary, the person who initiates the conversation should be the person who is trusted to do the job, so they do not “leave people [who trust them] in the dark.” From the leader’s perspective, that proves there is trust based on the level of consciousness shown by the person who is trusted.
Howard highlighted the importance of building trust with all constituents of the college he serves. He believed that it is crucial for students to feel that they can trust that once they enroll in the college, they will get the support they need and expect throughout their experience. When they graduate, they need to trust that they will have a smooth transition into the job market and to be able to contribute to society in the profession of their choice.

John believed that to build relationships based on trust, the leader must develop “first and foremost” respect for their team. In his opinion, a leader has to be comfortable to delegate a particular job to their team and to trust they are able to do it. As he stated, if they need the leader’s help, “they’ll come,” and this way the trust is established gradually, and it will strengthen. By doing so, the leader will be able to bring his followers to work together on solving any challenge they encounter.

Andrew was confident there was a high level of trust within his team and that they enjoyed working together. He shared that he is now part of an institution where he had a “very strong” trust within the team, and he did not have similar experiences at prior institutions. He considered that it is very important to develop a high level of trust with faculty members. This way they will trust the decisions reached by their leader and his “reasonableness of actions.” Especially in those instances when the leader is not at liberty to share their reasons or their thought process behind their decision. Andrew recommended that a leader should constantly work on developing and establishing trust with their followers. While at the same time, a leader should “make peace with the fact” that there will be times when they need to make some decisions that could erode the level of trust they have with their followers.

John knows that the professional relationship with his leader is based on trust. In his opinion, his leader appreciated John’s ability to “respect confidence” and to keep their
confidential discussions as such. He was aware that this level of openness at the executive level of leadership in an organization is not too common. John realized that betraying the confidence his leader placed in him would be counterproductive not only for him as an individual but also for the institution he is part of.

**Summary.** In summary, building relationships based on trust with their followers, peers, and managers was crucial for most of the participants. They considered their relationships based on trust to have a ripple effect within the organization by impacting the larger population they were leading and extended to the constituents they served. A few criteria for establishing relationships based on trust as they were brought up by the participants, were the leader’s ability to inspire respect, their ability to always keep their promises, and their commitment to be honest with their teams. In return, the leaders considered that their followers would trust and accept the leader’s “reasonableness of actions.”

**Giving people a voice and listening.** Howard believed it is very important for his followers to know that they have a voice, especially since this is a new approach for his team. He knows that people were “not used to having a voice for the most part” in the prior administration. This change in the leadership style caused some of his team members to become “unsettled.” Howard is aware that there are times when his people are not sure what to expect when they provide feedback to him. They do not know if it would be used in a judgmental way or not.

Howard stated that if someone is invited to the meeting, and they are in the room participating in that meeting, it is a guarantee that they will “have a voice at the table.” What will not be a guarantee, is that their voice “is the winning idea,” but for sure they have a voice. Recently, based on the feedback Howard received from his team, it seemed that they now understand they have a voice, and some interactions confirmed that. Howard mentioned that if a
leader believes that people “deserve to have a voice and a seat at the table,” and they believe in the merits of an individual, then they are more likely to implement a process of “genuine shared governance.”

Andrew makes it clear to his people that if they “have any feelings, reactions, anything about something” that they work together on, or something he had said, he would prefer to hear it directly from them. In his opinion, this approach makes things more productive. He prefers his people “give voice to that instead if they don't.”

Joanne considered that a successful leader needs to have “baseline skills” that allows them to understand different perspectives, and she thought that “everyone wants their voice to be heard,” especially when they work together on resolving a problem. She implemented one of her prior mentors’ best practices to ensure that she gave her team members the opportunity to have their voice heard. She mentioned that this administrator was “giving everybody an opportunity to put their fingerprints on it [on a project that needed to be accepted].” Her mentor would give each team member the chance to weigh in. By doing that, she was trying to get their buy-in, and in a best-case scenario, to achieve consensus. This leader believed that everyone should get a chance to have their voices heard. Joanne considered that for an administrator to be successful, they have to show empathy in their interactions, as she defined it, “the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.” In her opinion, this will give the administrator the ability to analyze an issue “from multiple perspectives, not just their own.”

Jessica’s approach was to advise her junior administrators not to allow the opinions of their team members to influence their decision-making process. She believed it was important for a leader to have their own moral compass, so they could make their own decisions, expecting
that their decisions will not be accepted unanimously. She warned them that as they move up in their roles, their teams will get bigger and bigger, and it will “just be more people.”

Andrew mentioned that he is a leader who listens with intention, and he “believes in allowing the process to unfold,” while he is guiding the process. He received feedback that his team appreciates that he is a leader who is showing interest in listening to his people. He is constantly listening to senior leaders in higher education, trying to understand their actions and reactions to the challenges they encounter in their role.

Mary underlined that the act of taking the time and truly listening is “a great motivator and a way to influence people.” She considered this to be “the most powerful leadership skill,” and she tries to employ it as often as possible. Her belief is that the best work and the best ideas come from people being comfortable in expressing and sharing their ideas. That happens when they feel “they’ve been heard,” and when their contributions are acknowledged. One important aspect of Mary’s leadership development and growth was that she developed listening skills and “getting better as a listener, getting better at letting people talk.” There were many instances when she had to change her strategy based on the feedback she received.

Mary considered that leadership is about getting the best idea out of the most diverse group of people and for her, “the best single way to do that is by listening and giving people time to articulate it.” She acknowledged that achieving that could be very difficult, and time-consuming, and it requires a lot of patience. It was important to her that people trust that she was listening to them, and her goal was “to infuse the same quality in the team, so that the team listens, and trusts one another.”

Being a leader caused Miriam to do a lot more listening. She wants to make sure she is collecting the correct information since this is how she is grounding her decisions. She would not
want to make a mistake just because she did not take the proper time to listen. Miriam’s advice for leaders was to always be comfortable knowing that they did their best. Even when the outcomes are not what they expected or hoped for. They need to take the time to listen. They need to pay attention and to care about the details when they collect information they base their decisions on.

Miriam provided an example when she was assigned a new division while the organization was going through changes, and the team was totally disengaged and “incredibly demoralized.” She managed to reassure them by intently listening to them, making them feel “heard, valued, and supported,” and they were able to focus again on their tasks and move forward. While she would not consider her efforts to re-engaging the team 100 percent successful, since her organization lost some talent, she still thinks that it was an amazing effort. Miriam shared another example when she was assigned another department that she was not very familiar with their operations, and she had to do a “lot of listening” to better understand their role. She did that by questioning, asking probing questions, and requesting them to explain to her their rationale for their requests. She considered that being in a leadership position taught her “how to listen.”

Sue emphasized the importance of listening to faculty to make sure they are supportive of the shared organizational goals, especially when a new program is launched due to the fact that they hold such an important role in the implementation of the curriculum. She mentioned that she was impressed by a leader who embraced the diversity of people’s points of view. She thought that by listening to people expressing different points of view on an issue, showed for that leader that she cared for her people, and proved that she had “wide arms, an open-arms approach to
people.” Sue also appreciated the fact that her direct manager listened to her “carefully,” when she asked for his guidance on problems she was facing.

Howard noted that he learned a lot early in his career by listening and watching leaders in their roles. He considered that he had always “been a student of leadership” without even realizing at times that he was learning by listening. He thought it was “quite interesting to be a student of the game.” As a leader, he emphasized the importance of listening. He makes a conscientious effort to listen to his people and to get back to them. To understand how his team’s perspective was generated, he noted that he listens to them “with earnest.” He wants to make sure his team members know they have a voice and that he is listening to them. Even though at times or even more so when their perspectives might be different. He thought that it helps with understanding people’s positions and accepting that they might not always understand their leader’s position.

John acknowledged the influence one of his mentors had early in his career in helping him to understand the importance of listening to his team. He knows how important it is to listen well and to pay attention to the “little things that people did and said.” He was appreciative of his mentor teaching him to ask “thoughtful questions.”

**Summary.** In summary, giving people a voice and taking the time to listen to them was considered by most participants a great tool to motivate and influence people and makes the process of shared governance easier to implement. Most participants noted that some of the most powerful leadership skills are acknowledging people’s contribution, giving them a voice, listening to their feedback, paying attention to the things people do and say, and asking them “thoughtful questions.”
Valuing and supporting people. Andrew knows he is leading strategically. While he is aware that he sets high performance standards, he is maintaining a “generally supportive and relaxed environment” for his team to meet those standards. He created an environment “where people feel valued and empowered.” Andrew shared that he shows respect toward his team members. He is respecting their judgments, and he is considerate of what they have to say. He uses his sense of humor as a “form of engagement” to keep his team involved and motivated, and he makes an intentional effort to “recognize the best in people.”

Joanne believed that the best way to “motivate people, is to value them, and to value their contributions.” She emphasized the importance for a leader not to “take credit for something they [their followers] have done,” and she shared that she saw this happening too much in organizations. Joanne also believed that a leader should care for their people, and they should see and hear their people. In her opinion, if the leader does not show that they value their people, they will need “to put out fires all the time.”

Jessica makes it very clear to her followers of how much she is valuing them and their work. She wants them to know how committed she is in supporting them in their professional success. Since the early phases of establishing a relationship with her direct reports, Jessica makes it clear that providing support to them is her priority.

She makes sure her direct reports know how important they are to her and that she is willing to address their requests right away. If that means that she has to adjust her schedule by “coming in early, leaving late” or she needs to interrupt a meeting, she will do that to ensure they know they have a level of access to her that others do not have. Jessica applies the same level of support to her peers, since being a collaborative team member is very important to her. She
wants to make sure they know that an important part of her role is to be supportive of their professional success.

Howard stated that he is intentional in making people feel comfortable and showing them their work is valued. He credited this approach to his abilities to read people and personalities and to recognize if someone has “an off day.” While he is not a leader who praises his team’s efforts often, he is validating their contributions by checking in and trusting that they are doing what is expected. He ensures that he is treating his people “with dignity” at all times. He makes sure to provide people the opportunity to give input on an issue, and he is actively listening to them.

John emphasized that early in his career he worked with a mentor who helped him understand the importance of acknowledging his team’s results, and the good things they did at all times being respectful toward the staff he was leading. He believes that each member of a team has something to contribute, and they are willing to do so. In his opinion, it is the leader’s role to ensure that people are comfortable making their contributions to the team. When the leader is able to build a sense of shared effort within the team, this is when they build a sense of teamwork.

John highlighted the sense of camaraderie and collaboration. His goal is not about one individual’s job that has to be done; the goal is that “we continue to work as a community, and we are greater than the sum of the parts.” He considered it was important for his followers to know that they are supported, especially when they cannot accomplish a set goal. He found a way to “share that burden with them,” and he felt that taking this approach is motivating his team. John believed that “people are motivated by their sense of accomplishment, their sense of self-worth, their wanting to, in a good way prove themselves, and accomplish things.”
Mary makes an intentional effort to support the new members of her team. She has been “very sensitive to how they are doing” and makes sure her team is working effectively together. It is important to know that they understand each other well, they are engaged in the work they are doing together, and they lead together the organizational change the organization is going through right now.

**Summary.** In summary, valuing and supporting people was perceived as a priority by most of the participants to this study. They shared how they believe they created an environment where people “feel valued and empowered,” how committed they were in supporting their people achieve professional success, and they made sure their followers were aware of that, and how they were treating people with respect and dignity “at all times.”

**Summary of being a leader.** The data analysis reflected that trust proved to be a key factor for most participants in building their professional relationships with their direct and indirect reports, peers, and managers. They hoped that building relationships based on trust and making people comfortable so they could deliver their best results would have a ripple effect throughout the institution. A participant shared that her relationships with her team were based on trust, leaving no room for fear of failure, which generated a high level of collaboration. Her team knew they could count on her to provide guidance and support when they needed. The most important thing for her was to know that her team, her peers, and her manager trusted her, as she shared that nothing meant more to her professionally.

The data analyzed for this study revealed that the participants emphasized the importance of creating a supportive environment and making sure their followers are aware that they have the support of their leader. One of the participants emphasized the importance of establishing the spirit of comradery and collaboration among the team members. He ensures his team is aware
that he is supportive of their efforts, especially when they do not accomplish their goals. His belief was that he is motivating them if he shows that he is sharing “that burden with them.” When he referred to the goal, he meant the team’s collective goal rather than individual goals, since his purpose as a leader was to bring the team to work together as a community and to bring people together.

The analysis of the feedback provided by the participants, revealed the importance of giving people “a voice,” as one of the participants noted for this to be the “most powerful leadership tool,” taking the time and truly listening to their people. She made an effort to do this as often as possible because she believed that the best ideas are generated when people have the opportunity to share their ideas, when they feel their voice is heard, and their contributions are acknowledged. She worked at developing her listening skills and giving the people time to express their ideas. She mentioned that there were numerous situations in which taking this approach proved to be an opportunity to change the course of action for implementing a strategy. That also showed her followers that she was open to listening and implementing their feedback.

Another participant noted that it was important for her to know what’s on her team’s mind, and she encourages them to provide constant feedback. She admitted that processing their feedback, especially the negative, was still a work in progress for her, and she stated that “sometime is easy, [and] sometimes is not.” She gets energized when she knows her team is engaged, and they are working together to implement transformational changes for their college. Her team is aware, that in return, she counts on their support. As she stated, “I say to them all the time, I can’t lead this change alone. I can’t. This is something we have to do together.”

The participants expressed in various examples that a great tool to motivate people, as one participant stated, “is to value them, and to value their contributions.” She continued by
emphasizing the importance of the leader to be able to “read” their people, to show that they care for them, and to see and hear their people. This participant believed that if a leader does not prove that they value their people, they will have to “put out fires all the time.”

Another participant stated that he is determined to make people feel comfortable and to show them that he is valuing their work. He was aware of his abilities to read people and personalities, and he was treating his people “with dignity” at all times. As he shared, when people know they have a voice, and a “seat at the table,” they are more effective in their roles, and “things are more productive.”

**Superordinate Theme #3 Leadership for Sustainability**

This superordinate theme was generated by analyzing the participants’ responses related to their understanding of the intense changes triggered by the market forces impacting higher education for the past several years. Their perception of their response to the market forces and their understanding of the leadership effectiveness sustainability was also analyzed. This section includes also the participants’ recommendations for future academic leaders on the steps they would need to implement to successfully navigate this era of transformation of higher education.

The following subordinate themes are clustered within this superordinate theme of

*Transformational Leadership for Sustainability: Responding to the Market Forces Triggering Intense Change; Sustainable Leadership Effectiveness; Communicating and Sharing Vision; and Shifting the Thinking for Transformation.*

**Responding to the market forces triggering intense change.** Miriam shared several perceptions of the positive and negative changes of the higher education environment. Her first observation was pertinent to the changing of the faculty role. She stated that in the past, their role was like an island since they were doing everything. Although the number of adjunct faculty has
increased considerably, now the role of the full-time faculty is changing. They still have to do research, which is not an expectation for the part-time faculty. However, with fewer full-time faculty on staff, the remaining full-timers have to do more service. This is increasing faculty workload, and it is stretching them to a point where their level of stress is considerably escalated.

Another change noted by Miriam, this time a positive one, is the increased number of people attending college. She thinks that college is not as “elite anymore” as it once was, and in her opinion, higher education institutions who cannot keep up with this change are adapting too slowly. The reality is that the number of high school graduates is shrinking, and thus “everyone is competing for a smaller group of students.” Miriam shared that there are more than 45 million adults in our society who either did not go to college or they dropped out and hold soon-to-be automated low-paying jobs. She mentioned that colleges will need to change their recruitment strategy to adjust to a different student population. Teaching strategies will have to be updated in response to the changes in market demographics, and colleges will have to do that fast.

Miriam noted that the services provided to students were geared in the past toward a residential model designed for high school graduates starting college. With the changing student population, that is not the case anymore since the student population now includes adults who are attending college part-time “because they're working to support their families.” The services and activities on campus must take these changes into consideration. One example that she provided was the commuting students who may not “stay for a pottery club because they're going home to families or jobs.” Miriam considered that the faculty should be adjusting their teaching style to ensure they engage students who “might be very smart, world smart, or street smart, or job smart, but not academic.”
Jessica believed that higher education is going through “a time of intense change” and as painful as it may be, it proves to be inevitable. She noted that people have the tendency to idealize the past, and going through this intense change makes some people uncomfortable. Her hope was that the intensity of the feelings caused by these extreme changes will not go on endlessly. She hoped that there will be some stability as people adjust to change by going through the “phases of almost grief.” She recognized that this change is as inevitable as it is cyclical, triggered by the overall changes in the higher education landscape. The availability of resources and the changes in the needs of the students were just a couple of examples she mentioned. She considered the structural processes in place in higher education for years and years are causing equity gaps, and they have to be discarded due to their ineffectiveness in helping students. Jessica believes that there is “structural racism built into the higher education system,” and until this is acknowledged and fixed and changes are implemented, students will not be served in the ways that they need and expect. As a result, she thought that will have a “human price” on the students’ future and their families.

Andrew believes that higher education, like any other industry, has a cyclic nature to it. Therefore, some changes encountered currently in higher education, for example, the number of prospective students, or the demographics of the student population, are cyclical. He expressed frustration at people who have the tendency to forget the past and are unable to recognize the cyclical nature of these changes. One example he provided was the significant challenge that many colleges are now facing due to lower student enrollment. He believed this has a big impact at multiple levels: financial, availability of resources, and institutional strategies, to name only a few.
Another example he provided is a unique challenge for higher education, which is not cyclical, and that is the value of college education now being questioned. He considered that this takes place due to the politics questioning the purpose of college education, and “what students are being taught in college.” He considered there is an anti-intellectualism promoted in the public and political discourse. The last example Andrew provided was online credentialing. He considered this trend a disruptive force, challenging the notion of a college degree as a credential in higher education as opposed to certificates or module learning that he called “badge-based learning.”

Mary mentioned one change, as she perceived it, and that was the polarization of the politics that makes it very challenging for administrators to focus on teaching and student learning. She mentioned how communication happens in our society generates more stress. Quite often she finds herself engaged in “very high stakes battles” with students, their families, staff, and faculty. Another change Mary mentioned is the commodification of college education. She described that nowadays higher education is considered a commodity, without the acknowledgment that the efforts and the energy have to be input by the person who seeks to be more educated. Education cannot be bought just because the students pay the tuition. “It requires a lot of work on the part of the person.”

John mentioned several changes, such as the decline of resources, and the political climate relative to the work faculty may or may not have done, which impacts the public’s impression of higher education. Another change he mentioned was the increasing number of part-time faculty, or the contingent faculty, who does not have tenure track or term appointments, which changes the dynamics on campus. Overall, John considered that the higher
education “enterprise” is going through significant changes due to the balance between the available resources and the cost associated with higher education.

Another change that John mentioned was the advancement of technology, specifically in the online environment. He thought his institution embraced the online environment, and he did consider that there are many benefits to this instructional option. However, one major negative side effect noted by John is the interpersonal interaction that he believes is “severely marginalized” in the online environment. Along the same lines, John stated that e-mail communication proved to be a detriment to interpersonal relationships, since he believes people are now hiding behind the screen and “do or say things they would rarely say in public.” He considered that human capital is the greatest asset of higher education. Yet in his opinion, professionals continue to use tools that “inhibit interpersonal relations,” and increasingly use the technology that “erodes the sense of camaraderie and community.” Another impact of the advancement of the technology that he noted is the vast amount of information that is now available to students. The faculty have to teach their students to discern the quality, availability, and reliability of the data. They must also teach their students how to focus more on their ability to determine the “depth and quality of the information” versus the speed of gathering the data.

Sue noted the changing demographics of our nation, and specifically that of the student population, the changes in their values and expectations, and the changing beliefs of the younger generation. She expressed her frustration with the delayed response of the higher education institutions, since she considered these types of changes were predicted and expected to happen. In her opinion, higher education institutions, particularly smaller colleges, should have been better prepared to respond to these changes, as she thinks that, “higher education simply did not respond.”
Sue considered that not listening to the expectations of the incoming student population is a “huge mistake.” She believed that institutions make “an enormous mistake” by not providing the students what they expect, in addition to what they need, and by not maximizing the skill set they bring as they join college. She stated that this is caused by the circumstance that institutions are led by a generation who is trying to maintain a learning mode as it was developed in the 1950s when students were taught in a lecture hall modality. Whereas, the incoming students are used to a different learning style they experienced “in Montessori” schools. Sue believed that if academic leaders will not let go of their biases of how education should be, and they will not acknowledge the difference in the skillset among the generations, they would do a disservice to their institutions and to their students.

Joanne noted the changes in demographics of the student population, and she thought that the traditional student model is changing “very rapidly.” For example, more and more students are not residing on campus, there are changes in demographics “in terms of race and ethnicity,” and the students’ perception and respect of the authority of the faculty members. These changes have started to manifest already, since the students are “different” and that “will prompt more change in the way the faculty teach, and the assumptions they make about their students.”

Andrew mentioned that the pressures of the market forces that impact higher education have become increasingly competitive in the last few decades. For example, fundraising, increases in tuition, and a myriad of other factors make higher education institutions more and more complex organizations to lead. That requires every leader to take a cross-functional approach by meeting the requirements of multiple roles, such as being an advancement officer, admissions officer, and for that reason working more cross-functionally became an expectation for academic leaders.
He also mentioned the broader economic factors, the demographic trends, and the expectations for a leader to function more effectively and efficiently, especially from the financial aspect of operating cost-effectively and cost-efficiently. The main reason, as Andrew perceived it, was that tuition increased in higher education each year above inflation. In most cases, that trend had stopped, and that creates more financial burdens since the need for “resources hasn’t abated.”

John addressed the speed of response administrators have to implement in their actions. This is due mainly to the technology that has “flattened the world,” and has more of a negative impact than a positive one on the speed of response that administrators in higher education possess. He believed that leaders need more time to reach important decisions. They have to be intentionally thoughtful, to identify the answers and the solutions to the plethora of challenges their organizations are facing. He felt that there is now an expectation for immediate answers, without allowing the leaders enough time “to think, or time to ruminate on something.” He believed this approach creates more stress for leaders, and he thought that the solutions they reach are short-term, and they have not been carefully articulated. In his view, the speed of response to market forces has had more of a negative impact than positive. This is due mainly to the use of technology. That creates a tension between the need to respond and the time required to generate a thoughtful response for the interaction to be effective. He thought that higher education “is really struggling with that.”

Mary shared that the speed of response had increased in the past few years, since communication has now became instantaneous, and things are happening at an expedited rate of change. She considered that this creates a very highly charged environment, which sometimes makes it feel “kind of high stakes,” and that is “very much more challenging.” She is concerned
that the fast response creates room for error, and the mistakes a leader could make in their hastiness to respond can come back “to haunt” them. This is one more reason why they have to ensure that they did their best when deliberating upon a decision. To compensate for this rate of speed, Mary shared that she “redoubled” her efforts to collect the information required to make a decision, to ensure that she has the correct information from the initial stage of the decision making process. This has helped her to be more reflective as a leader, to listen with intent, to be more data-driven, and to use data more consciously in her decision-making process.

Mary feels more pressure from market forces that have turned education into a commodity, now more than when she started in the role. Her perception is that “everything [education] is marketed” as a product graduates need to have to obtain a job, and “it is not about becoming; it’s about earning.” She is also worried that these market forces have an impact on what and how the decisions are made, decisions that undermine the “quality and integrity of education in higher education.” She noted that this happens frequently at either public or private institutions but not in her current role. Mary credited that to her vast experience. She expressed confidence in her decision-making process, feeling comfortable in a “very dynamic environment.” Now, she is able to anticipate the reactions to her decisions much better than she would have been earlier in her role.

Sue mentioned several market forces, such as the changing of population demographics, the pool of high school graduates that is “drying up,” the cost of higher education that has escalated to a point where “middle-class Americans could not afford it.” She noted that it was expected for higher education to change to make the “benefits worth the cost.” Sue expressed her frustration that small colleges and universities are only now implementing changes that should have been implemented “at least a decade ago,” and they have to quickly adapt to keep up with
the transformation of higher education. She specified the reason for this delay to be the fact that some small colleges have clung to “the status quo,” and only now they are trying to catch up with the change, making it “hard to keep up.” Sue believes it is critical that leaders should not “cave” under pressure, while emphasizing the pressure they are under is “absolutely enormous.” She believes institutions now have the capacity to implement the necessary changes. However, leadership development must become a priority, since it will take a long time, as this is a “generational change,” in her opinion.

**Summary.** In summary, the participants noted that the market forces experienced by their institutions are reshaping the higher education environment, and they are triggering intense change. In their opinion, this change is painful, yet inevitable. Some of the changes listed by participants were the different demographics of the student population, the different role of the full-time faculty, the advancement in technology, specifically the online education, the use of social media as an instant communication tool, and especially the speed of response it demands.

**Sustainable leadership effectiveness.** Howard discussed the importance of sustainability of the leader’s effectiveness and pointed out that the idea of sustainability should include innovation. He shared that very early on in his career he was interested in improving “program effectiveness [and] program efficiency” based on innovation, undergirded by the notion of fairness, equity, and the understanding of the “needs of diverse constituents.” Howard believes that the market forces create pressures that challenge the organizations, and while the leader should welcome accountability, they should also seek to be sustainable around effectiveness. He continued stating that the leader should make sure they do not only meet but exceed their goals and their organization’s expectations. At the same time, they have to maintain a core identity of
their organization “who they serve.” He recommended that leaders strive to be “nimble and innovative, to be sustainable around effectiveness.”

In his role, Howard emphasized how important accountability and self-accountability are and how he maintains a focus on leadership effectiveness, as he is “always thinking about issues as efficiencies.” He stated that he takes a systematic approach for implementing leadership strategies in his role. While some of his team members might have to change their operating mode, he hopes they would eventually acknowledge the changes that he implemented are increasing their efficiency.

Miriam felt that her current role is where she is most effective in regard to the college hierarchical structure. She credited her leadership effectiveness to her ability to calm people down, to learn quickly, to make difficult decisions, and to explain her reasoning for reaching her decision, especially when these decisions are different than what they would have anticipated. She offered an example of increasing the reporting effectiveness of her team. She is asking them to provide their monthly updates using a certain template, so that she could review the report quickly. Another factor that contributes to her leadership effectiveness, as mentioned by Miriam, was that her faculty members trust her, and because of that, she was able to mentor them and implement changes in “departments at a sort of the grassroots level.”

John thought the effectiveness of a leader can be defined by several metrics, for example, the products they build, the quality and the type of students their programs attract, and their graduates. For an academic leader, the quality of the faculty they hire to teach at their institution can determine their leadership effectiveness.

Andrew shared that for higher education institutions to be more competitive, they must meet the current market factors and needs of their constituents. With the constraints that higher
education institutions are facing, their leaders must become more efficient and effective in their roles. He considered these “challenge and tension points,” which a leader has to navigate well, in order to be effective in their role. This creates a certain level of stress for the academic leaders, who are trying to maintain the quality of their programs and a high morale of their teams, while combating diminishing resources; this could be achieved only by reaching a “much more cost-efficient way,” and that requires more energy and effort from the leader in order to achieve and sustain effectiveness. His college added new academic programs in the past few years. He found this to be very engaging, since he was able to use his leadership skills effectively in moving the college in the direction toward academic growth.

**Summary.** In summary, when participants discussed the importance of sustainability of the leader’s effectiveness, they considered that sustainability should include innovation, and that requires for leaders to be nimble in their actions. The high level of trust their relationships are based on, allows the participants in the study, to implement sustainable changes at a deep level in their organizations, in some instances “at a sort of the grassroots level.” Higher education institutions are facing numerous constraints, and they were perceived by participants as “challenge and tension points.” They were aware that they are expected to navigate these well in order to be effective in their current roles.

**Communicating and sharing vision.** Miriam considered that sharing the team’s goals is a critical component of their success. In her opinion, if everyone is sharing the same vision and sharing the same sense of mission, it is much easier for the team. Her modus operandi is to empower her followers to be leaders. She has multiple units she is overseeing, and she makes sure the priorities of each unit are in line with the vision set by the College President. She
considered the ability of a leader to assess their effectiveness and communicate it upward to be of crucial importance for their success.

Jessica thought it was very important to support her College President’s vision. While at the same time, she is maintaining her own vision and making sure that she communicates it to her direct and indirect reports by sharing her values and her motivation. Jessica strives to better understand her President’s vision so she could deliver it to her followers. To avoid any guessing on the part of her team, she clearly communicates her vision and her views of the direction for the institution, so they know where they need to channel their energies. She considered it “essential” to be constantly communicating with her team the reasons behind implementing the change, so they better understand why there is a need and urgency for organizational transformation.

John emphasized the importance for a leader to communicate their vision through words and actions. He shared some traits of several prior mentors, a prominent one being that they were engaging, yet not overbearing in a managerial sense. This made them popular and effective leaders who won the respect of their peers.

Andrew shared a main quality in one of his prior mentors that impressed him was that he was a visionary leader. His vision for the institution was well defined. He tried to bring out the best in people; he treated them with respect and with a strong sense of humanity. He was a sensible leader and had the ability to “move a vision forward.” Andrew shared that working with a mentor helped him solidify his “sense of vision and purpose.” It helped him find his voice as a leader and to develop “the ability to enact a vision [and] to create a strategy” that will move departments, if not the whole institution toward accomplishing that shared vision.
Mary shared that the main reason for her to join her current institution was the opportunity to work with a visionary leader who is focused on conceptual and creative areas, who is not necessarily “a nuts and bolts manager.” She considered this to be helping her College President in doing a “magnificent job” since he is always focused on the next initiative he could launch. It was important for Mary to know that she works with someone who is “very visionary” and supports her ideas. She shared that having the opportunity to transform an organization in a significant way, by “affecting its trajectory,” was very rewarding for her.

**Summary.** In summary, participants experienced that communicating and sharing a vision makes it easier for the team to accomplish their goals. They considered that sharing the reasons behind the need for organizational change was essential, and it helped their followers become more aware where they needed to channel their energies and took out any guessing on their part.

**Shifting the thinking for transformation.** Miriam mentioned that the incoming academic leaders will most likely be “more business-focused.” She thinks they should be “able to shift their frame of reference more easily” and adapt to the rapidly changing student population. She mentioned that “one thing about faculty is faculty don't like change.” Therefore, she noted that future leaders will need to get faculty on board to accept the changes that must be implemented. She mentioned that most of them attended elite institutions, and they are used to a more traditional model of higher education. Miriam believes the new wave of academic leaders will be successful in their role if they would be able to help faculty make the mind shift in understanding the situation “as an opportunity, not a threat.” They would have to expand their thinking and consider the whole student, accepting they have family and job responsibilities, and that “attending college is one piece of their complex lives.” She continued by saying, if the
faculty “don’t want to do something, it won’t happen” and until the faculty can expand how they think of their students, to thinking of individuals, we're going to be in trouble.”

Jessica considered it to be her responsibility to lead the transformation of her institution. One of her goals is to communicate to her team the need for this transformation, so they get a better understanding of why the organization must change. She stated that higher education is not predisposed to transformation, and she recognized that a lot of things need to change quickly in higher education. One of her recommendations was that “people need to discard practices that are not effective in helping students.” She did acknowledge that her entire college needs to evolve not only one department or one division. For this transformation to be “effective and long-lasting,” she considered that the change has to be implemented with urgency and in “multiple ways in multiple places.”

Sue shared her opinion that future leaders in higher education will face the same challenges as current leaders are facing right now, but she had no doubt that they “will figure it out.” She believes that during transformation, there will be much growth, pain, and also success, and she was convinced that “intergenerational transformation works.” She believed that for the past few decades, higher education has struggled with growth, with change, and the reason being a desire for change and a desire to maintain the status-quo.

In Sue’s opinion, one advantage that future leaders have is that there is intentional leadership training taking place in higher education, which was not the case in the past. For a long time, leadership development was offered only to professionals who were already in their role, as it was the case with her and many of her peers. She was convinced that “one fine day you won't be able to move through a system without having intentional leadership education in higher education.”
Howard shared that there are considerable pressures in higher education related to “teachers’ preparation” due to a belief that “schools of education are failing America” by not properly preparing its teachers. He mentioned the dropping enrollments and the increased competition among colleges. In his opinion, to alleviate these challenges, his college has to deliver programs that are of “value, sound, innovative, coherent, supportive, and articulated.” He considered the current leaders are not doing enough advocating within the profession, which can help with fundraising. The reason for that he thought could be due to their lack of training in this area.

John made a point that the advancement of technology is presenting new challenges for faculty on expanding their views on pedagogy, and on the other hand, it provides different ways for them to interact with students. He anticipated that the incoming leaders in executive positions, and even future deans, will need to challenge their assumptions about pedagogy that “that they might have held for a long time.” They will have to depend more on data so they can equip different types of students. They will also have to gain a set of skills different from today’s outcomes. He noted that the collective decision-making process is gaining more ground in higher education, and that will limit the administrators’ autonomy in reaching their decisions.

In John’s opinion, to reach a collective decision the incoming administrators in higher education will have to establish collaborations with people who initially might not be likely partners in the decision-making process. This approach has already become essential in his current role, where he has to make decisions based on collaborative conversations with people from various departments. One example he provided was addressing issues related to international partnerships. This approach required for John to adjust his own decision-making style, by taking more time to think through strategies, accepting that it is not only his perspective
that is important, re-adjusting his timeframes and expectations, and beginning to see and understand things through “other people’s lenses.”

Andrew shared his perception that the pressures in higher education had increased in the past few decades, and colleges had become “more and more complicated organizations to lead.” He also mentioned that the students’ expectations kept increasing, not only in academics but in other departments such as, Student Life, or Student Services. In his opinion, for colleges to remain competitive in this environment, they will have to meet the students’ needs.

**Summary.** In summary, most participants shared the importance of changing their thinking toward leading and implementing the transformation. They considered that for the organizational transformation to be effective and long lasting, they will need to get the faculty’s buy-in and to help them perceive, with some urgency, the situation as an opportunity for changing their organization and not as a threat. They were aware though that faculty do not like change and stated that overall higher education is not predisposed to change; yet, change has to be implemented with urgency.

**Summary and sensemaking of superordinate theme: Leadership for sustainability.** The participants agreed that the higher education “enterprise” is going through intense changes. Some of them expressed their frustration that their institution responded too slowly or did not respond altogether. They believed change in higher education is cyclical, and it should have been anticipated. Even though they were aware that this will take a long time, most of them were confident that their institutions would be able to adapt to the changes in their new environment.

Higher education leaders of the 21st century encounter a completely different set of challenges compared to those met by their predecessors in the past century. Studies showed that breakthrough change became a requirement, and radical organizational reinvention is a necessity
(Hacker & Roberts, 2003). As most participants noted, as painful as it is, change must happen, and it has to happen urgently. Some examples they provided for the desired changes are summarized here: a) the recruitment strategy needs to adjust to a different student population; b) the services provided have to be adjusted since the student population is no longer limited to recent high school seniors residing on campus, and now includes working adults commuting to the campus, or taking classes online; c) the faculty need to change their teaching style since these students are used to learn in a different format than the lecture halls style implemented in higher education decades ago; d) with the advancement of the technology, faculty need to update their teaching to include teaching students how to discern between the quality versus quantity of information, and the speed of gathering the data versus the reliability of its source; and e) leaders need to take a cross-functional approach to be effective and to meet the demands and the multitude of responsibilities of their roles.

The academic leaders participating in this study considered their responsibility to lead the change, to help their followers to recognize the changes as opportunities and not to perceive them as threats, and to make sure they are comfortable so they can be engaged in transforming their institutions. They perceived their role as a catalyst for the transformation of their teams, institutions, and in the long term, of their future graduates. As a participant noted, for their leadership effectiveness to be sustainable, it has to include an innovative component. The general perception among the participants was that leaders have to be effective and efficient in meeting their constituents’ expectations and their needs, and to do that, they have to counteract successfully the constant challenges their organizations encounter in their environment. One participant believes that leaders should to be “visionary in what we [they] do at the same time.” Being a visionary leader and having the ability to communicate their vision to their followers
was perceived as a crucial factor for being successful in the academic leadership role by most participants. The majority of the participants perceived leading the organizational change and transformation as being their leadership responsibility.

**Findings**

In a study that sought to collect detailed meaningful data about the leadership experiences of academic leaders, the participants shared their sensemaking and their perception as it related to their leadership effectiveness within the context of a rapidly changing environment. An IPA data analysis revealed emergent themes around the process of becoming a leader, being a leader, and transforming toward leadership effectiveness for achieving success in the domain of higher education.

The following findings derived from the data analysis will aid in the exploration for the answer to the research question.

**Finding #1 Motivated by Passion to Serve Advancing from Teaching to Leadership**

Participants became leaders mainly because they were motivated by their passion to serve, and even though they did not necessarily aspire to academic leadership initially, they **advanced from teaching roles to leadership roles.** All participants in the study were administrators in higher education having years of teaching experience. Some of them shared, that even now that they hold administrative roles, they are still applying the teaching skills they mastered early in their careers, with every opportunity they get. Their audience is just different, since they are teaching now professionals in the role already, their staff. For example, one participant shared that as an administrator he is helping—his “people learn how to understand their programs better, how to ask the right questions, how to use the data for example, and how to engage in continuous improvement of their programs.” Another participant stated that
throughout his career of over 35 years, he never “stopped being a teacher.” He shared that what is important for him now at this stage of his career “is the effect I can have on future leaders through mentoring, […] sort of giving back to people who still have a long career in administration.”

The in-depth data analysis reflected that for most of the academic leaders the advancement of their career from being a teacher to becoming a leader happened naturally as a result of their passion for helping people maximize their potential, their desire to bring people together, to provide coaching and mentoring, and to train and develop faculty.

Finding #2 Importance of Development

Academic leaders emphasized the importance of leadership training and development as an organizational priority. The data collected showed that for most participants training took place after they were appointed to their role. Their experience of enhancing their leadership skills included completing training on the job, such as observations and informal training. Several participants perceived the leadership training they received as an “amazing learning opportunity” and “transformative.” They stated that it helped them change their perspectives on leadership, allowed them to advance their careers, and gave them confidence to accept leadership roles. The participants emphasized the importance of leadership training and development as an organizational priority and an imperative for preparing new leaders, so they will not succumb to the enormous pressure they have to combat, and they would be able to lead a sustainable transformation for their organizations.

Finding #3 Leadership Behaviors Influence Effectiveness

Academic Leaders perceived that their leadership behaviors can influence their effectiveness in the role. The analysis of the data revealed that academic leaders strive to be
innovative, and they are “nimble” in taking proper steps towards increasing and sustaining their leadership effectiveness. As a result, the focus the academic leaders apply on issues impacting their leadership effectiveness and efficiency has become the norm rather than the exception, influencing their behavior and modus operandi. Data showed that some leaders are implementing various tools to improve the effectiveness of the data analysis for their decision-making process and the efficiency of the reporting process. The leaders’ hope was that the changes they implement have a trickledown effect, and on the long term, their followers would acknowledge that these type of changes are improving their own efficiency.

Finding #4 Leadership Sensemaking was Based on Emotional Intelligence Behaviors

The participants reflected and made sense of the leadership effectiveness by citing their self-awareness, reflection, vision, empathy, openness to feedback as essential hallmarks of effective leadership in higher education today. The inductive analysis of the data gathered during this research revealed that the emotional intelligence traits, such as self-awareness, reflectiveness, openness to feedback, having the ability to build relationships based on trust, showing empathy, sharing vision, and supporting and valuing people, were considered by the academic leaders essential hallmarks of effective leadership in the role. One participant stated, “It is all about reading people,” and successful administrators need to have the ability to relate to “a million flavors of academia.” Data showed that the emotional intelligence traits helped these academic leaders interact effectively with people on various levels of their organizational chart.

Finding #5 Effective Leadership can Confront Change and Transformation

Although participants identified change as cyclical (and somewhat predictable), they believed effective and sustainable leadership should be able to confront transformation
drivers. Data showed that academic leaders have noted a dramatic change in student demographics, their needs and expectations, and the major paradigm shifts in pedagogy that are due to those student changes as well as the implementation of the technology tools available. As the data reflected, the academic leaders now more than ever expend more effort and energy to cope with the pressure and reduce the stress of taking a cross-functional and cost-effective approach to meet the plethora of demands in their roles. The market forces triggering the changes in the higher education environment are real constraints that an academic leader has to constantly deal with, and they create tensions these leaders successfully navigate by implementing an effective and sustainable leadership. The participants had no doubt that the intergenerational transformation will work as “it has always worked,” and they expressed confidence that their colleges and universities will be able to implement the changes and adapt to their new environment.

Finding #6 Leaders Adopted the Transformational Model

Academic leaders adopted toward the transformational leadership model. Although the participants defined leadership through traits and situations, the data show that they adopted the transformational leadership style in their practice during transformational times. This happened mainly due to the highly charged changing environment that they cope with every day. As a result, the academic leaders adopted more transformational leadership attributes to be able to lead the changes their organizations must go through to adjust to the new landscape of higher education. The data reflect that the participants perceived the transformation and implementing of structural changes in their organizations as their leadership responsibility. They considered that the effectiveness of an academic leader in that role can be transformative to their teams and institutions.
Finding #7 Leaders Advanced and Communicated Visions

The participants considered furthering the vision of their leaders and communicating their own vision with clarity, as being transformational for their organizations. The data reflected that for most participants, it was important to further their leader’s vision, which in most instances their leader was the institution’s President, and to be able to share with their team their own vision with clarity, either through words or through their actions. They noted that this has a transformational effect on their teams and organizations, especially when they are implementing major changes in their organization. As one participant shared, she made it one of her main goals to understand her college President’s vision, so she could help her accomplish it. She believed it was her responsibility “to create clarity,” and she strives “to deliver a clear vision of [her own] view of where the institution needs to go.” One of her goals was to communicate in that manner her own vision to her team, while supporting the vision of her President. Another participant shared how much he valued a leader’s ability to share their vision when he described the leadership characteristics of his mentors, who he perceived them as “consensus builders, they had vision, and they also were able to communicate that vision verbally and with their actions.” The first thing that came to a participant’s mind when discussing the leadership characteristics of one of his mentors was this leader’s ability to develop a vision and to materialize it, which demonstrates how crucial was this ability for this participant.

Finding #8 Transformative Behaviors Enabled Effectiveness

The academic leaders perceived their transformative behaviors enabled leadership effectiveness and they shared their sensemaking of their perceived measure of effectiveness with their leaders, peers and followers. The data analysis revealed that most participants
assessed their leadership effectiveness constantly, and they used various tools to evaluate it. One participant acknowledged that she has been constantly searching for ways to evaluate if she is an effective leader for her team. She perceived that her team’s level of performance was a direct reflection of her effectiveness as a leader. “I look to see how well they are functioning as a team as a measure of how they are doing with me as a leader.” Another participant shared the indicators he considered relevant when evaluating the effectiveness of a leader, such as the effectiveness of the product they built, the quality of the faculty they hired, the quality of the students enrolled and the quality of the college or university alumni.

Another participant mentioned that when she is trying to gauge her leadership effectiveness, she is constantly asking herself the following question, “How do you assess your effectiveness and how do you communicate it upward?” She advised her direct report to use the same question when they are trying to determine their own leadership effectiveness. She is constantly advising her followers to present their accomplishments and the impact they had on “the larger context of the institution” and to “make them more visible” to the larger community of the college and its President.

**Summary**

The main goal of this study was to explore the understanding of the leadership effectiveness of a professional in a senior executive role in academia and their sensemaking of their professional experiences. Eight senior academic executives at 4-year colleges or universities in the Northeast region of the United States were interviewed for this research. While conducting the research, valuable data was gathered from the participants and an inductive analysis was conducted. The findings of the inductive analysis of the data collected are listed in Table 7.
Table 7

*Findings of the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Supportive Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivated by passion to serve advancing from teaching to leadership.</td>
<td>Data reflected that the academic leaders were motivated by their passion to serve and that helped them to grow in their roles, even though they did not necessarily initially aspire to academic leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of development.</td>
<td>Training and development ensures that future leaders can deal with the enormous pressure they encounter in a rapidly changing environment and they will be better prepared to lead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership behaviors influence effectiveness</td>
<td>Data reflected that academic leaders sought ways to be innovative and nimble in order to increase their leadership effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership sensemaking was based on emotional intelligence behaviors.</td>
<td>Data showed that academic leaders considered their emotional intelligence traits essential for being effective in their executive roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective leadership can confront change and transformation.</td>
<td>Data illustrated that academic leaders perceived themselves as catalysts for implementing the changes needed in their institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders displayed aspects of the transformational model.</td>
<td>Data reflected that the ability of academic leaders to communicate vision has a transformational effect on their teams and organizations, especially when they had to implement major changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative behaviors enabled effectiveness.</td>
<td>Participants shared their perception of the effectiveness of the measures they implemented to assess their leadership effectiveness in their current roles.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

These findings will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five, and they will help to answer the main question that guided this study:

How do today’s academic leaders of higher education institutions perceive and make sense of their experience as leaders?

In Chapter Five, these eight findings of the study will be presented in greater detail and their implications in practice will be addressed. Also in Chapter Five the implications for practice will be addressed and the recommendations for future research will be made.
CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The higher education environment of the 21st century has brought forth significant challenges for colleges and universities. Scholars claim that the US higher education system has “reached another critical juncture in its history” (Gagliardi et al., 2017, p. ix). Higher education institutions have a rich tradition and a wonderful history; however, their past cannot serve as a compass for their future trajectory (Gee, 2009). To continue to deliver on their mission to educate tomorrow’s professionals, there is tremendous pressure for higher education institutions to adapt to their new environment. They can accomplish that by implementing sustainable change through innovative approaches, with visionary leaders at the helm, who will be willing and able to transform their organizations. They will have to find new ways to respond to the market forces that trigger intense changes. To define their niche in the new landscape of higher education, higher education institutions will have to implement transformational changes while preserving their unique identity that makes them the preferred choice of their students.

A large number of executive roles in higher education are currently filled by leaders who are expected to reach their retirement age in the near future. The anticipated retirement of these high-level academic executives such as Provosts, Deans of Academic Affairs, Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs, could cause a major challenge for institutions to fill top academic leadership roles with experienced leaders. Implementing succession plans properly can present an opportunity for recruiting and appointing new exceptional leaders in the vacated roles. To ensure that they meet the expectations of their constituents, while they adapt to pressing challenges in the new environment, these institutions will have to appoint transformational and visionary leaders in their C-level executive roles (Bateh & Heyliger, 2014). Without these exceptional leaders at the helm, higher education organizations cannot implement the needed changes. As a
result, as one of participant noted, that will have a “real human price” on the students who will not be served as their needs require, and as the college promised to them, and as “that they and their families depend on, and their future depend on.”

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and professional behaviors of senior level academic leaders in current roles and their understandings of leadership effectiveness and their perceptions of the elements that had an impact on their success as leaders. This study used the qualitative IPA to explore the professional experiences of eight academic leaders in senior roles. The aim was to illuminate the features of their experience that had an influence on their leadership effectiveness and to provide information to help future senior academic leaders in becoming aware of the leadership behaviors, traits, and capabilities they will need to develop to enhance their effectiveness in the role.

In this chapter, a summary of the study is presented, the research question is reiterated, the literature review conducted is reintroduced, and the IPA method implemented for conducting this study is described. The findings of the study are discussed in greater detail, and their connection to the literature review and to the theoretical framework used for this study are explored.

**Summary of the Study**

The main goal of this study was to explore the sensemaking of academic leaders of their leadership effectiveness, and their perceptions of influences on their effectiveness. The main research question with the two sub-questions which guided the study were:

How do today’s academic leaders of higher education institutions perceive and make sense of their experience as leaders?
1. What is the perception of academic leaders of leadership effectiveness in higher education?

2. How do executive academic leaders make sense of the agents that influence leadership effectiveness?

The literature review revealed the need for transformational leaders acting as catalysts in implementing sustainable organizational change in colleges and universities. The research showcased the influence of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership have in aligning a new leader’s career on the path to success. The literature identified that there is a dearth of theory and research of the elements that influence the leadership effectiveness of C-level executives in higher education institutions. The literature review included an analysis of the following existent bodies of literature: higher education environment in the twenty-first century, educational leaders of the future, emotionally intelligent leadership, and leadership effectiveness in academia.

The methodology used to conduct this qualitative study was IPA. Implementing the IPA method for this study allowed the focus to remain on the participants’ personal meaning of their experiences and their sensemaking of these experiences and not on the experience itself (Larkin et al., 2006). The key advantage of this methodology was the opportunity for a detailed and nuanced description of each participant’s sensemaking of their professional experience (Smith et al., 2009). The sample was small and homogeneous consisting of eight participants, and that allowed the research to “unpack the idiographic experiences of those participants in great depth” (Spiers & Smith, 2016, p. 837). The intention was to interpret the data collected during the research by applying the double hermeneutic process, which required a high level of engagement.
with the participants, described by Smith (2011) as a scenario “whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (p. 10).

The inclusion criteria were: possession of a terminal degree; a tenure of a minimum of eight years in a senior level academic executive role; and currently serving in an executive role. Some of these roles included: Chief Academic Officer, Provost, Assistant Provost, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Executive Dean. All participants were located at a 4-year college or university located in the Northeastern region of the United States.

When data were analyzed, first themes were identified for each participant, and then common themes were identified across all participants in the study, generating three superordinate themes each with several subordinate themes. In Figure 3 are listed the superordinate and subordinate themes that led to the findings of the study.

**Figure 3**

*Superordinate and Subordinate Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Becoming a Leader</th>
<th>Being a Leader</th>
<th>Leadership Sustainability</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning to Leader from Teacher</td>
<td>Building Relationships Based on Trust</td>
<td>Responding to Market Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Leadership through Training and Observing</td>
<td>Giving People a Voice and Listening</td>
<td>Triggering Intense Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Reflective and Self-Aware</td>
<td>Valuing and Supporting People</td>
<td>Sustainable Leadership</td>
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<td>Effectiveness</td>
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<td>Communicating and Sharing</td>
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<td>Vision</td>
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<td>Shifting the Thinking for</td>
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<td>Transformation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The findings of the study that emerged as a result of an in-depth analysis of the data collected while conducting the research are listed in Table 8.
### Table 8

**Findings of the Study and Supportive Statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Supportive Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivated by passion to serve, advancing from teaching to leadership.</td>
<td>Participants became leaders mainly because they were motivated by their passion to serve and even though they did not necessarily aspire to academic leadership initially, they advanced from teaching roles to leadership roles.</td>
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<td>Academic leaders emphasized the importance of leadership training and development as an organizational priority.</td>
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<td>Leadership behaviors influence effectiveness.</td>
<td>Data reflected that academic leaders sought ways to be innovative and nimble in order to increase their leadership effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership sensemaking was based on emotional intelligence behaviors.</td>
<td>The participants reflected and made sense of their leadership effectiveness by citing their self-awareness, reflection, vision, empathy, openness to feedback as essential hallmarks of effective leadership in higher education today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective leadership can confront change and transformation.</td>
<td>Although participants identified change as cyclical (and somewhat predictable), they believed effective and sustainable leadership should be able to confront transformation drivers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders adopted the transformational model.</td>
<td>Academic leaders adopted the transformational leadership model during transformational times for their institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders advanced and communicated vision</td>
<td>The participants considered furthering the vision of their leaders and communicating their own vision with clarity, as being transformational for their organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative behaviors enabled effectiveness.</td>
<td>The academic leaders perceived their transformative behaviors enabled leadership effectiveness, and they shared their sensemaking of their perceived measure of effectiveness with their leaders, peers, and followers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion of the Findings

The next section discusses the findings reflected by the data analysis and their relation to the literature review conducted in Chapter Two and their relation to the conceptual framework explored for this research. This study adopted the theoretical framework of the full-range leadership theory developed by Bass and Avolio (1994), with an emphasis on the transformational leadership and its four components and adopted the conceptual model of emotional intelligence and workplace effectiveness created by Pinos et al. (2006). The relation of these theoretical frameworks to the findings will also be discussed.

Discussion in Relation to the Literature Review

The literature review included an analysis of the following existent bodies of literature: higher education in the 21st century; educational leaders of the future; emotionally intelligent leadership, and leadership effectiveness in academia. This segment presents both how this study could add to the current body of knowledge, illuminating the influences on the leadership effectiveness of the higher education academic executives; and explains how this study could fill a gap in the current literature.

Higher education in the 21st century. The literature states that higher education institutions are facing mounting pressure for implementing changes, and in order to keep up with their shifting environment, these organizations have to implement change from within, define a focus on the turnaround, and identify the leadership they need to complete the transformation (Fullan & Scott, 2009). Higher education institutions are in need of transformational leaders who will be willing, able, and prepared to address and resolve the challenges encountered by their institutions and to set a new course for stabilizing their future and improving their effectiveness in educating our nations’ future professionals (Gonaim, 2016).
This theme from the literature relates to the finding of the study that participants believed *effective and sustainable leadership would be able to confront transformation drivers*. The market forces triggering the intense changes in higher education are major constraints that an academic leader has to constantly deal with, and most participants perceived change as cyclical and somewhat predictable. These changes create tensions, and the leaders navigate them successfully by implementing effective and sustainable leadership. One of the participants shared his belief that leaders should welcome accountability, while they should seek to be sustainable around effectiveness.

A similar insight in the study by Mader et al. (2013) reflected that future leaders need to be supportive and able to implement a 21st century agenda to ensure growth for their institutions, and they have to become “sustainability literate and change implementation savvy.” (p. 274). Existing work on this concept suggested that higher education institutions should apply a more concerted focus in implementing effectively and sustainably their sought-after transformation at the institutional level (Mader et al., 2013). It is clear that colleges and universities cannot ignore the transformation drivers, the market changes, as this is a storm they will have to weather for the next several years, and as one participant emphasized, “This is a generational change.” The participants in this study had no doubt that the intergenerational transformation will work, as “it has always worked,” and they expressed confidence that their colleges and universities will be able to implement the changes and adapt to their new environment.

**Educational leaders of the future.** The literature review emphasized the importance of leadership training as Knights and Wall (2013) considered that leadership skills can be learned through leadership trainings and that a professional in a senior level role should have both management and leadership skills. The findings of the study conducted by Gosling et al. (2009)
emphasized the benefits of providing formal leadership training to the newly appointed academic administrators into executive positions, since it was determined that leadership skills could be learned and developed.

Dulewicz and Higgs (2004) stated that there is a “strong consensus” that an individual can develop their emotional intelligence skills, since its capabilities are malleable, and “workplace experiences have a significant impact on this shaping process “(p. 96). These statements confirm the finding of this study where academic leaders emphasized the importance of leadership training and development as an organizational priority. Most participants acknowledged that they went through specialized training only after they were appointed to their role. Their statements were aligned with prior research that showed that more and more members of the academy took on leadership roles, with very little prior leadership training (Gosling et al., 2009). Gonaim (2016) claimed that department chairs are making more than 80% of the administrative decisions in an institution. However, most of these professionals received no leadership training prior to being appointed to the role. For example, in a survey conducted in 2004, including 2,000 department chairs as participants, only 3% acknowledged that their institution was providing to their employees a formal training program (Gonaim, 2016).

Prior research analyzed the skills and qualifications an executive leader should develop to successfully lead their company in the 21st century in a “hypercompetitive, multi-faceted and multicultural global environment” (Heames & Harvey, 2006, p. 29). Most participants felt that they had to handle “enormous” pressure to meet the various demands of the multiple responsibilities of their roles, and they expressed the need for formal training provided to leaders so they would not cave under pressure, and they would be better prepared to handle it. One participant stated that intentional leadership education should be provided starting at
undergraduate level of one’s education, to better prepare the leaders of tomorrow, so they will not “succumb” to the tremendous pressure they will encounter day to day in their roles.

**Emotionally intelligent leadership.** The literature illustrates that leadership has an emotional component to it since the connection between the leader and their followers involve sharing something personally, and for that to take place, an emotional connection has to be established (Miller & Sardais, 2011). This confirms the finding of this study where the participants reflected and made sense of the leadership effectiveness by citing their self-awareness, reflection, empathy, openness to feedback as essential hallmarks of effective leadership in higher education today. The in-depth analysis of the data illustrated that academic leaders considered their emotional intelligence traits as essential for being effective in their executive roles. One of the academic leaders perceived that her “emotional intelligence” helped her “establish the relationships.” For example, she developed a certain communication style, showing that she was sensitive to people’s feelings, and “remembering that people are people.”

Research confirmed that the ability to understand others’ emotions increases a leader effectiveness by allowing them to better understand different points of view (Gardner & Stough, 2002). Along the same lines, Butler et al. (2014) stated that the components of emotional intelligence, especially self-awareness, could trigger an increase in the leader’s perception and their effectiveness. These authors posited that leaders who have a higher level of self-awareness show less inflexibility in their decision-making process, they understand better the impact of their decisions on followers, and this emotional awareness allows them to develop customized messages so they could better communicate the team’s goals. This increases their leadership effectiveness by setting higher levels of trust and collaboration within their teams.
The participants shared that trust was a key factor in establishing their relationships with their reports, peers, and managers. Their perception was that building relationships based on trust and ensuring that people are comfortable to deliver their best performance will have a trickledown effect in their organizations. Their belief was that when people have a voice and a “seat at the table,” they have a higher level of effectiveness in completing their tasks, and “things are more productive.” Prior research showed that this type of leaders are aware of their actions and behaviors, and that contributes to increasing their leadership effectiveness (Butler et al., 2014).

Another participant mentioned that the success of an administrator in their role is determined by their ability to “read practical and political context.” She considered empathy an important skill, allowing the leaders to put themselves in someone else’s shoes. This participant considered that it would be helpful for leaders to evaluate a situation and “look at an issue from multiple perspectives, not just their own.” Existing work by Fullan (2002) reflected that leaders who are pursuing organizational change in their organizations, need to practice impressive empathy. “Impressive empathy” requires the leader to have the ability to understand the peoples’ point of view and their reasons for opposing the anticipated change, “as if I were in their shoes” (Fullan, 2002, p. 12).

Several participants emphasized the importance of creating a supportive environment and making sure their followers are aware that they have their leader’s support. Hacker and Roberts (2003) posited that when leaders promote a collaborative team environment, and they nurture the relationships with their followers, they can be more effective in guiding and channeling their employees’ emotional energy. Hacker and Roberts underlined this concept by describing the differences in leadership approaches for channeling followers’ energy toward achieving the
organization’s mission. They described a continuum from the past approaches that consisted of “command and control,” toward the present approaches used in this new millennium that are based on “discovery” (Hacker and Roberts, 2003, p. 132).

The existing literature has demonstrated that when a transformational leader shares their vision, they are “intellectually and emotionally stimulating” their followers (Higgs & Rowland, 2002, p. 69). That confirms the finding that the participants considered furthering the vision of their leaders and communicating their own vision with clarity as being transformational for their organizations. The data reflected that the ability of academic leaders to communicate and share a vision had a transformational effect on their teams and organizations, especially when they had to implement major changes. One participant shared her emotions by stating that she was admiring her “visionary” leader. She also shared that working for a leader who was “remarkable in his vision,” was the main reason why she joined her current organization. Also, knowing that she can lead transformational changes in her organization, impacting it in a significant way, with effects that will “live beyond” her tenure in the role, was “satisfying” for her at this point in her career.

Another participant acknowledged that his leadership style was modeled after leaders who were visionary and able to communicate their vision both verbally and through their actions. One more participant shared that he has a strong sense of vision, an “eye for where we want to go,” and he has the ability to enact his vision and move the institution, “or parts of it” toward his vision. This fits in with existing literature that suggests that exceptional leaders have the ability to build a common vision generated based on their skills of identifying future opportunities for the organization, and they inspire their team members to engage their professional aspirations with a common goal of the group (Kouzes & Posner, 2013).
Leadership effectiveness in academia. The literature states that leadership effectiveness has been studied since early 1930s, yet the elements that are influencing it are still a topic for current and future research (Higgs & Rowland, 2002). Existing literature suggested that leadership performance is evaluated from two aspects: leadership efficiency related to the outcomes generated from inputs and leadership effectiveness that evaluates the actual outcomes versus the set goals (Nazim & Mahmood, 2016). Leadership effectiveness has two types of variables: attitudinal, such as “job satisfaction and organizational commitment”, and behavior variables, like “job performance and organizational citizenship behavior” (Yang & Zhou, 2016, p.161). This confirms the finding that the academic leaders assessed their leadership effectiveness and shared their sensemaking of their perceived measures of effectiveness with their leaders, peers and followers. The participants shared their perception of the measures they implemented that could help in determining and measuring their leadership effectiveness.

As one participant shared that she has been “very sensitive to how they [her direct reports] are doing”, and she was trying to figure out if she was “doing the right things to help them.” She is actively evaluating her leadership effectiveness by using different ways to gauge it. For example, she set-up workshops for her team so they could get to know each other better, deepen their understanding of working together, and identify ways to work more effectively as a team. In her opinion if her team is “functioning well” that is a measure of her effectiveness as a leader. Her college was going through unprecedented change, and her statement fits in with the existing literature suggesting that for leaders in an organization undergoing change, leadership effectiveness requires a “combination of well-developed emotional intelligence and specific change leadership competencies” (Higgs & Rowland, 2002, p. 73).
The study conducted by Mora and Ticlau (2012) showed leadership effectiveness can take various forms, for example, leaders meeting the expectations of their role, representing efficiently their group to their leaders and being supportive of their teams for fulfilling effectively their roles’ responsibilities. Just as another participant shared, he measured leadership effectiveness evaluating several indicators, such as the effectiveness of the product the leaders build, the quality of the faculty they hire, the quality of the new students enrolling at the institution, and of their alumni. Another participant shared that as long as she accomplished her goals and her organizations’ goals, she considered her leadership “highly effective.” Fullan (2002) posited that a leader’s effectiveness will be determined by their legacy and not by who they are as professionals.

Another participant shared a question she is constantly asking herself and her leadership team, “How do you assess your effectiveness and how do you communicate it upward?” She described one form of the support she offered to her team as “translating” and helping her department managers “put what they’re doing into the context, the larger context of the institution, and then how to make it visible” to the larger community of the college and its President.

**Gaps revealed.** The data analysis conducted revealed eight findings of this study. From these findings, five aligned and contributed to the four threads of the literature review conducted prior to conducting this study. Three findings listed below address the gaps in two ways: they shed a different light based on the specific findings from the data analysis, and they provide evidence as reflected by the interpretation of the sensemaking of the participants of their lived experiences.
Participants ascended to leadership from their teaching roles. It is noteworthy that most participants in this study became leaders by transitioning their careers from teachers to administrators in higher education. During this process, they transformed from educators into leaders, while they transformed their followers at the same time.

As they shared, some of them are still applying their teaching skills in their current roles when they get the opportunity, now teaching a different audience, professionals of higher education. As one of the participants stated, he maintained his teaching skills in his administrator role by helping “people learn how to understand their programs better, how to ask the right questions, how to use the data for example, and how to engage in continuous improvement of their programs.” Another participant stated that throughout his career of 35 years, he never “stopped being a teacher” and what is important for him now in his role “is the effect I can have on future leaders through mentoring, […] sort of giving back to people who still have a long career in administration.”

Data showed that for most academic leaders, the shifting of their career path to a leadership role happened naturally as a result of their passion for helping people maximize their potential, their desire to bring people together, to provide coaching and mentoring their followers, and to train and develop faculty members. These participants recognized that they did not contemplate a leadership position early in their careers, and they did not seek an executive role with intentionality. One of the participants shared her perception of a “historical tension” between faculty and administration, as she shared that faculty members perceive the administrators as the “dark side of academia.” Bolden et al. (2009) emphasized the significant role an administrator plays in moving their institution forward, and the participant stated along
the same lines of thinking, that she realized very early in her career that as an administrator she “could have a far greater impact by working with faculty and graduate students.”

*Participants perceived leadership behavior influences effectiveness.* It was evident from the analysis of the data gathered that the majority of the participants sought ways to being innovative and nimble in order to increase their leadership experience, and they implemented different tools to improve the processes’ efficiency and their effectiveness of analyzing the data as a step of their decision-making process.

*Academic leaders displayed aspects of transformational leadership.* The participants defined leadership through traits and situations, yet the data reflected that they adopted the transformational leadership style. Existing literature suggested that transformational leaders use coaching and mentoring techniques for their followers to encourage them to seek a higher level of responsibility and to develop them into future leaders (Avolio et al., 2004). Just as most of the participants shared their desire to help people, to coach and mentor professionals, and to bring people together.

**Summary.** Northouse (2016) considered that transformational leadership involves displaying emotions, sharing principles, charisma, influence, setting and sharing visions and goals, and changing and transforming all parties involved in this process, both leaders and followers alike. The interpretation that participants adopted more of the transformational leadership attributes to be able to lead successfully the transformations their institutions go through is deepened when taking into consideration the highly charged changing higher education landscape they encounter every day. Just as most participants emphasized the importance for a leader to be self-aware of their skills, both weaknesses and strengths and to be continuously learning and seeking what the limitations are in their current role and to have the
willingness to change to become the transformational leaders their teams and organizations need in this time of intense change.

**Discussion in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted the full-range leadership theory developed by Bass and Avolio (1994), with an emphasis on the four components of the transformational leadership model. The conceptual model of emotional intelligence and workplace effectiveness created by Pinos et al. (2006) was also considered. The emotional intelligence model developed by Goleman (2001) was used to inform this study.

The conceptual framework used for this study is illustrated in Figure 4. This figure illustrates the four clusters of Goleman’s (2001) emotional intelligence model and the four components of the transformational leadership included in the full-range leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), Idealized Influence (II), Individual Consideration (IC), Individual Motivation (IM), and Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and the leadership effectiveness (Pinos et al., 2006).

Yang and Zhou (2016) defined two types of variables for leadership effectiveness: attitudinal (organizational commitment and job satisfaction) and behavioral (organizational citizenship behavior and job performance).
The alignments between the findings, as they were revealed by the in-depth data analysis, and the conceptual framework, are presented below.

**Self-awareness > Idealized influence > Work performance.** Transformational leaders can inspire their followers to deliver additional effort by motivating them and exhibiting confidence in their ability to deliver superior performance (Yang & Zhu, 2016). The inductive analysis of the data gathered during this research revealed that the emotional intelligence traits of self-awareness, reflectiveness, openness to feedback, and having the ability to build relationships
based on trust, showing empathy, sharing vision, and supporting and valuing people were considered by the academic leaders as essential hallmarks of effective leadership in their role.

Most participants acknowledged that emotions—theirs and their followers—play an important role in their interactions in the workplace. One participant shared that she is able to recognize her followers’ emotions since she was able to “see where someone is at emotionally and responding to it,” and another participant shared that she has the ability to connect with her team members at an emotional level, and that she is able to keep her emotions in check. This approach was shared by another participant who stated that he has the ability to control his emotions, especially the negative ones.

Another participant stated that showing emotions, especially for women leaders, “is a negative thing,” but she “didn’t care” about that. She continued by stating that the leader “has to love the people,” and when the followers will realize that “when you demonstrate to them that you mean it, they trust you.” This aligns with the conceptual framework applied for conducting this study and the concept presented by Pinos et al. (2006) who stated transformational leaders help their followers align their goals with organizational goals and the organizational benefit is tied to their above-expectations performance level.

**Self-management > Individual consideration and idealized influence > Organizational commitment.** Pinos et al. (2006) affirmed that a transformational leader can control their emotions better by being able to build a high level of trust with their followers and as a result, employees display a higher level of organizational commitment, especially during the organizational change. The finding of this study identified that most participants defined leadership describing traits and situations. However, the data analysis revealed that they adopted more transformational leadership attributes over time, and they displayed aspects of the
transformational leadership style in their practice. Yang and Zhu (2016) posited that transformational leaders have the ability to inspire followers to deliver their additional efforts by motivating them and exhibiting confidence in their ability to deliver superior performance.

One participant perceived the sense of accomplishment as a strong motivator for people, and he believed that it provides a sense of self-worth for them. Another motivating factor, in his opinion, was people’s desire to accomplish their goals and to prove themselves, “in a good way.” This confirms the theory of Pinos et al. (2006) who stated that setting specific goals and communicating them clearly to the team have a positive impact on the job satisfaction of the employees and their organizational commitment.

Pinos et al. (2006) posited that transformational leaders become effective motivators for their followers by giving them credit and encouraging them to receive the credit and recognition for their superior performance. Just as another participant mentioned how important it is for the team to have their leader acknowledge their contributions by incorporating their ideas in the plans they made and in the language they use. By practicing that, a leader will show to their followers that they are listened to, they are heard, they are understood and their ideas are taken into consideration. Another leader shared a similar belief as she stated that the best way to motivate people is for a leader to show to them that they are valued, and to let them know when they make valuable contributions, and most importantly, not to ever take credit for their ideas or contributions.

*Social awareness > Individualized consideration > Organizational citizenship behavior.*

Applying their social-awareness traits, transformational leaders are able to properly evaluate a situation, and their “followers’ level of comprehension” of it (Pinos et al., 2006, p. 69). This aligns with the notion shared by the academic leaders in this study who constantly assessed their
leadership effectiveness. One participant noted that the better an academic leader becomes at reading practical and political context in an organization, the more successful they are in their role. She considered that this ability will help them predict the implications of their decisions on different constituents, and in their decision-making process for the “good of the unit.”

Another participant shared that in every position he held as an administrator, at multiple institutions, he encountered an environment where the team members worked in silos. He had to break that up by dismantling the culture and “building a culture of collaboration.” This participant stated that there was some level of collaboration existent; however, the professionals encountered difficulty in understanding each other’s work, even though their work was interconnected, and as a result that generated duplication of their efforts. This concept was supported by the work of Yang and Zhu (2016) who considered that transformational leaders are able to increase their team’s cohesion, by enhancing collaboration between members from the same team or from different departments, thus increasing organizational “cross-border communication” (p. 160).

One participant recollected the time when her college went through a major transition recently, and the employees felt “scared for their positions, angry and marginalized by the institution.” She did “a lot of listening” and showed to her followers in that unit, that they are “heard, valued and supported” and that helped them to focus, “move forward” and cope with the transition. This aligns with the theoretical framework applied for this study illustrating that transformational leaders are able to help their team members get a better understanding of the impact of their work in the organization, motivating them and increasing their followers’ satisfaction (Yang & Zhu, 2016).
Prior studies showed the transformational leader’s ability to build solid relationships based on trust with their followers. This trust of the leader leads to loyalty resulting in being motivated to do for their leader and the organization more than what is expected of them, or more than what they intended to do initially (Yukl, 1999). In line with this theory, the participants discussed they had the ability to build relationships based on trust with their followers, peers and managers, and this was very important for them. They hoped that their relationships based on trust would have a ripple effect within the organization and impact the larger population they were leading. This fits in with the existing literature that describes transformational leadership as a process of establishing a professional relationship between a leader and their followers that generates, for everyone involved in this process, an increased level of dedication to the organization and their moral principles (Northouse, 2016).

One participant shared that her relationships with her peers are based now on “a lot more trust,” than they were in the past, and that trust generated a “lot more collaboration.” Another participant shared that good relationships built with her direct and extended reports have had a ripple effect on the larger population she is leading. Their enthusiasm and engagement in the work they do together energizes her to “thinking of designing new strategies,” and trying on new things. This aligns with Yang and Zhu’s (2016) theory that a leader’s behavior can have a positive influence on their followers’ work attitude by increasing their enthusiasm.

Another participant considered that her influence as a leader is fueled by the relationships she established with her subordinates, and she shared the effort she puts into “understanding their perspectives” since it is “all about the rapport built.” One more participant mentioned that her followers are perceiving her leadership style as supportive, as they find it helpful to have a strong
woman as a leader, and they considered being transferred to her unit, “a gift.” These approaches
align with Pinos’ et al., (2006) concept that transformational leaders provide support for
development of their followers, they strive to generate synergy in their teams, and that these
actions result in changes in a positive direction of the followers’ attitude towards their job.

**Summary.** The conceptual framework used as a lens for interpreting the findings of this
study describes how the four components of the leadership effectiveness (Yang & Zhou, 2016)
of academic leaders in higher education is perceived as being influenced by the correlation
between the specific components of the emotional intelligence and the transformational
leadership (Pinos et al., 2006). The findings of this study confirmed that the participants
perceived that their emotional intelligence traits were essential hallmarks of their effectiveness in
fulfilling their responsibilities of their executive roles in academia. They adopted the
transformational leadership style throughout their tenure in the role, in the process transforming
themselves, their followers and their organizations.

**Conclusions of the Study**

This section includes the conclusions drawn from the findings that pertain to the
academic leaders who participated in this study and how they made sense of their leadership
effectiveness. The conclusions also consider the discussion in relation to the literature review and
the theoretical frameworks as presented.

The conclusions of this study in relation to the findings generated based on the in-depth
data analysis conducted, are illustrated in Figure 5.
Implications for Practice and Additional Research

In this section, the implications for practice and the implications for further research will be presented. The limitations of the study, as they became evident after the study was implemented, will be discussed. The implications for practice are framed as recommendations that come from the findings of the study that are expected to illuminate influences on leadership.
effectiveness. This can help future leaders gain a better understanding of the leadership behaviors, traits, and capabilities they could implement to lead their teams and organizations more effectively in the new landscape of higher education of the twenty-first century. Innovative pathways will help emerging and future leaders navigate these tumultuous times, caused by the unrelenting pressures of today’s higher education environment. This kind of leadership will enable higher education institutions to continue to be the engine for the upward social mobility of the coming generations.

**Recommendations for Practice**

**Recommendation for practice #1: Implementing leadership development.** Based on the findings of this study and in line with prior research presented in the literature review, it is recommended that professional development become an organizational priority in higher education. Leadership training provided early in a professional’s career and on an ongoing basis throughout their career, can lead to greater leadership effectiveness. This training should also include those professionals who are not actively seeking a leadership role, since leadership training can help them self-identify as potential leaders.

The recommendation is to develop focused programs for leadership training and development and to avoid leaving unexplored various leadership styles, such as transformational, shared (collaborative) and the distributed leadership models, or the authentic leadership style. The new leaders should seek to implement the type of the leadership style that best fits their individual, team and organizational goals, and that will increase their leadership effectiveness. Northouse (2016) stated that to be an effective leader, a professional has to adapt their leadership style according to the demands of the various situations they encounter. In various situations a leader has to take both a directive and supportive approach. Their leadership style could be a
unique combination of various leadership styles, which could change depending on the stages in their tenure, and of the organizational change.

Lumby (2013) posited that distributed leadership provides leadership opportunities to everyone who has relevant experience for the role, increasing the leadership equity since it doesn’t provide leadership privileges to certain professionals or to individuals from certain categories. The distributed leadership is considered a novelty in leadership, and there is anticipated that it might replace other leadership forms, such as transactional or charismatic, since it is considered as “more effective because more inclusive” (p. 583).

Another leadership style, one of the most recently researched, is the authentic leadership style, which focuses on the leader’s legitimacy achieved by building honest relationship with their followers (Stein, 2017). Northouse (2016) considered that authentic leadership can be nurtured since it is not a fixed trait, and it develops in people over their lifetime, being usually triggered by “major life events” (p. 196).

These professionals could adopt the transformational leadership style especially during times of change, as they lead the transformation of their organizations, since one of their main characteristic is their ability to set new paths for their teams (Cavazotte et al., 2012). Training is perceived as crucial in ensuring the new higher education leaders are prepared to deal with the pressures they have to combat in their roles and helps them to identify different leadership models and what is applicable to their environments. It also supports them in becoming able to lead a sustainable transformation for their institutions.

**Recommendation for practice #2: Enhancing emotional intelligence for leaders.** The findings of this study reflected that leaders considered their emotional intelligence traits essential for being effective in the role. Prior research presented in the literature review, confirmed that
professionals with a high level of emotional intelligence are perceived more positively by the people they interact with, and they are considered to have a higher level of empathy and higher level of performance and success in their career (Mayer et al., 2008).

Therefore, a recommendation is made for organizations to provide training to enhance the level of emotional intelligence of their leaders. The training will increase the leader’s emotional intelligence competence that reflects how one’s potential for “mastering the skills of Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management and Relationship Management translates into on-the-job success” (Goleman, 2001, p. 27).

As Chopra and Kanji (2010) posited, emotional intelligence can be trained, developed and enriched. The training techniques could include “lectures, discussions, videos, exercises, dialogue, role play, diaries and one-to-one feedback” (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2004, p. 101). Leimbach & Maringka (2010) recommended developing the emotional intelligence abilities through training and “team-learning intervention” (p. 140). There are several tools to measure the progress made in increasing the emotional intelligence competencies (Rosete & Chiarrochi, 2005). For example, the 360 assessment completed by the leader’s manager and their direct reports, the self-report measure of the emotional intelligence developed by Palmer et al. in 2001, using the Swinburne University EI Test, and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Mayer et al., 2004).

**Recommendation for practice #3: Sustainability of leadership effectiveness should be fueled by continuous innovation.** Based on the findings of this study and in alignment with the existent literature, a recommendation is made that sustainability of the leadership effectiveness of the executives in higher education is fueled by constant research and innovation. For example, focusing on increasing program effectiveness and efficiency, as one participant
stated “throw away all the old ways of doing things” and “teach the students innovation and how to think out of the box.” As a result, leaders will be better equipped to be the catalyst for sustainable change in their organizations, to challenge the status quo, and to lead the transformation of their organizations.

**Recommendation for practice #4: Build capacity for change.** Based on the findings of this study and in line with the existing literature, a recommendation is made for higher education organizations to build the infrastructure for sustained change. That will require developing short- and long-term strategies for organizational transformation and appointing visionary and transformational leaders at the helm, who will be able to implement these strategies effectively. These leaders will need to develop the ability to implement with fidelity and materialize the vision of the President of their institution, and to clearly communicate their own vision through words and actions, to motivate their followers and the community of their organization.

**Recommendation for practice #5: Develop systems for prioritizing and delegating.**

Based on the findings of this study and in alignment with the existing literature, a recommendation is made for higher education leaders to develop standardized systems that allow them to prioritize and delegate the plethora of tasks and challenges they must solve on daily bases, so they could focus better and reach a sustainable and increased level of effectiveness they strive for.

**Limitations**

This study is not free of limitations and that should be taken into consideration when reviewing its findings. In Chapter One, the limitations are acknowledged to be the following: a) as per the qualitative research guidelines the analysis of the data was inductive therefore they cannot be generalized (Creswell, 2015); b) the sample was small as per IPA recommendations,
therefore the sample cannot be considered representative (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012); c) the sample was also homogeneous, since all participants were leaders of similar units in comparable organizations, as they are overseeing the Academic Affairs at a 4-year private of public college or university, and they are located in the same territory of the United States, the Northeastern region, and that prevented “random sampling” (p. 365).

As this study concluded, the following limitations were discerned: a) despite intentions to recruit a diverse sample of participants, from the eight participants who were willing to participate in the study, seven of them were White; b) all participants, except one, were located in New York State; c) all participants began their careers as teachers and advanced to administrative roles. Recommendations for future research to extend upon these findings by addressing the limitations are listed below.

Recommendation for future research #1: Increasing diversity of participant sample. A similar study could be replicated with a sample of participants consisting of non-White senior academic administrators, to bolster the voices of professionals from different ethnic backgrounds, and to discern the influences on their leadership effectiveness to see if there are differences based on race.

Recommendation for future research #2: Expand the territory for conducting research. Since the current study was completed with participants based only in the Northeastern region of the United States, a similar study could be conducted with senior academic administrators based in various regions of the United States. Higher education institutions respond differently to various local market factors from different geographical areas; therefore, a study collecting data on this topic could provide useful knowledge to leaders who are new in their roles who might be relocating to a different region.


**Recommendation for future research #3: Determining current trends in the ascension of faculty members to administrator roles.** The sample for the current study was homogeneous, including participants who advanced from faculty members to senior leadership roles in academia. A similar study could be planned to identify the trend line of executive leadership in higher education, by illuminating the ascension of the faculty members to academic leadership roles.

**Recommendation for future research #4: Conduct similar research with senior academic leaders from community colleges.** The participants in this study were senior academic leaders at 4-year colleges or universities serving the traditional student population. Considering the differences in student population at community colleges, and the expectation that their student population will continue to grow in the next decades, a study collecting data from senior academic leaders from these colleges might prove useful to future leaders by helping them increase their leadership effectiveness in their role to better serve their students.

**Summary.** The implications for practice were outlined as recommendations, and they were based on the findings of the study, which are expected to illuminate the elements that have an influence positive or negative on the leadership effectiveness. The recommendations for future research were based on the limitations and constraints that arose while the study was conducted, and they include suggestions regarding replica studies that, if conducted, could expand the knowledge regarding the elements that have an influence on the leadership effectiveness.

Sharing the knowledge generated by this study provides one more opportunity to the participants to fulfill their passion to help people reach their potential by helping new leaders become more effective in their roles. Consequently, the findings of this study are important for
the participants in the study by acknowledging their contributions and confirming that their voices were heard, to future leaders interested in increasing their leadership effectiveness, as well as for other practitioners and scholars who are exploring the factors that have an influence on leadership effectiveness.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Higher education institutions of the 21st century have to implement change faster and more profoundly than in the late-19th, and early-20th centuries when their models were unchallenged and therefore, they remained largely intact (Christensen & Eyring 2011).

The freshman students soon entering through the doors of their college or university of choice are seeking various formats of study. They are the 21st century scholars, who are either digital natives with a different learning style than the traditional lecture hall serves or they are post-traditional students over 25 years old, who have work, family, and other responsibilities with a different set of skills. The higher education institutions they opted to attend must implement transformational changes in order to meet the needs of these diverse student population in order to fulfill their promises made to these students. The students and their futures depend on these promises.

As the findings of this study identified, the academic leaders in this study perceived themselves as catalysts for leading and implementing the needed changes in their organizations. Change leaders make note of the conditions necessary for change. For example, Robert Gates is the former Secretary of Defense serving under two US Presidents, a former Director of CIA, and for more than four years, the President of Texas A&M University. He implemented successful changes in these three major organizations. In his views, institutions which undertake transformational reforms, at the same time trying to preserve and enhance their distinctiveness,
“have one thing in common: the need for bold, visionary leaders at all levels who can discern a different and better future for the organization [they lead] and who can map a realistic path to attaining that future” (Gates, 2016, p. 24).

The findings presented from this study can shine a light on the experiences of effective higher education leaders that may help higher education C-level executives to better understand the influences on their leadership effectiveness so they may become the exceptional leaders their team, their organization, and their stakeholders count on in these times of profound change.
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