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**The Factors Associated with Presidential Derailment at
Selected Private, Liberal Arts Higher Education Institutions**

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jason Dyer McNeal
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DEDICATION

To my wife, Heather, my daughter, Shelby, and my son, Sam. Lovingly and without complaint, you surrendered valuable family time allowing for the completion of this project. Each of you inspires me.

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To Dr. E. Grady Bogue, the able chair of my committee, I owe an intellectual debt. With a measure of significance, he has influenced my thinking and, through his own scholarship, encouraged me to link coherence with compassion when considering the work of leaders.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe those factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailments at selected private, liberal arts higher education institutions. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What factors are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?
2. What events are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?

Data were collected from 17 in-depth, one-on-one interviews with sitting and derailed presidents, vice presidents, a governing board member, higher education consultants, executive coaches, and a derailed president's spouse related to four private, liberal arts colleges in North America. In addition, media accounts of the presidential derailment, field notes, and a personal journal served as sources of data. Findings of the study included support for four of five themes presented in the conceptual model. The four themes supported, problems with interpersonal relationships, failure to meet institutional objectives, inability to lead key constituents, and inability to adapt have been previously identified as themes associated with for-profit business executive derailment. The fifth theme included in the conceptual model, failure on the part of the president to act ethically, was not found.

Two additional and distinct contextual themes, failure of the governing board to act ethically, and diminished governing board functionality, emerged as well. These findings suggest that presidential derailment within the higher education enterprise may be more complex

than executive derailment within the for-profit business arena. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background of the Study

Do leaders matter in the lives of their organizations? While the question may appear trite and easily, if not predictably answered, it is perhaps surprising to note that this question has generated a considerable amount of research and discussion within the organizational theory literature over the last 25 years (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). During the incipient debates, there emerged little agreement with respect to an answer. However, in the last decade, an “abundant stream” of research has created an affirming consensus among organizational scholars (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996, p. 25). Recently, Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great* (2001), studied all Fortune 500 companies listed between the years 1965 to 1995 to find those “great” companies that experienced significant and sustained growth. To qualify as “great,” the company needed to show “the following basic pattern: fifteen-year cumulative stock returns at or below the general stock market, punctuated by a transition point, then cumulative returns at least 3 times the market over the next fifteen years” (pp. 5-6). After finding eleven such companies, and controlling for industry, Collins suggested the variable most responsible for explaining the transformation of the “great” companies was leadership (Collins, 2001). Leaders, it would seem, do matter.

The notion that leaders make a difference in transforming organizations from “good to great” also suggests that ill-prepared leaders or “derailed” leaders can contribute to declines in organizational performance (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). Indeed, research focused on leadership derailment was originally conducted with the purpose of helping businesses avoid costly leadership turnover events and creating more effective leadership training curricula.

The definition of what constitutes an executive derailment has evolved over the course of studies and contexts. For instance, Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) suggested that the derailed executive or manager is one that either “leaves the organization nonvoluntarily. . . or is plateaued as a result of a perceived lack of fit between personal characteristics and skills and the demands of the job” (p. 1). More recently, and writing from the Centre for the Study of Leadership at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, Beverley McNally and Ken Parry have studied executive derailment within the context of the pressures of a global company (McNally & Parry, 2002). They defined derailment as occurring “when an executive leaves their role either voluntarily or involuntarily, prior to their originally-intended time of departure, due to an inability to perform as expected or fulfill role requirements” (p. 7). Adding the element of time, McNally and Parry expanded the previous definition, suggesting that derailments are specialized occurrences differentiated from other forms of workplace departures.

A number of themes have been found to be related to executive derailment including problems with interpersonal relationships (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988), failure to meet business objectives (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987), inability to build and lead a team (Kaplan, Drath & Kofodimos, 1991), and inability to change or adapt during a transition (Kovach, 1986; Kaplan, Drath & Kofodimos, 1991). In some instances, attitudes and aptitudes that were viewed by supervisors as early-career professional assets and provided reason enough to fast-track, or expedite an employee toward an executive level position, later emerged as professional liabilities and caused derailment to occur on the employee’s journey to executive level positions (McCall & Lombardo, 1983).

While the existing executive derailment research is valuable, there are at least two problems when attempting to apply the findings to the chief executive position of a higher education institution. First, what we know presently about executive derailment focuses on the employee as she is on her way toward achieving an executive level position, not once she has attained the top position. Van Velsor and Leslie (1995), stated that derailment has primarily been applied to the employee “. . . who, having reached the general manager level, finds that there is little chance of future advancement due to misfit between job requirements and personal skills,” (p. 62).

Second, this research has been conducted primarily within the for-profit business sector (McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Lombardo & McCauley, 1988; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995; Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996; Hollenbeck & McCall, 2001) and generalizations to the non-profit, higher education enterprise are questionable. Tropman and Shaefer (2004) stated that the nonprofit field in general “is new to (derailment) research” (p. 163). One of the stated purposes of their research was “to open a dialogue on the subject and expand the field of ‘derailment’ research” (p. 163). They offered an “executive flameout” framework that included the concept of derailment and attempted to explain “executive problematics,” a four-stage system for categorizing executive misconduct. Specifically, the four stages explored were: “detours, periderailment; derailment; and the most harmful, flameout/calamities” (p. 162). Detours and periderailments referred to situations in which the executive was remaining busy but was spending time and resources on efforts that were not effective and, in most cases, not related to organizational goals. Derailments occurred when executives were fired based on performance or other offenses that, to some degree, were harmful to the organization. Flameouts or calamities,

however, were reported as public, flagrant, typically destructive acts that led to dismissal. Such situations can be harmful to both the individual and the organization. While useful in making distinctions among degrees of executive malfeasance, the review of the literature and newspaper articles provided by Tropman and Shaefer (2004) did little to advance knowledge related to the factors associated with executive derailment in nonprofit settings.

Within the specific nonprofit context of higher education, we know even less about executive or presidential derailment (Bogue, 1994). In fact, the only research found that addresses derailment within any type of educational setting speaks to K-12 superintendents. As Calabrese and Roberts (2001) stated, “derailment, although an issue in the private sector, is paid scant attention in the education sector” (p. 267). They suggested that the cause of leadership derailment within the ranks of school superintendents “is found in the individual character flaws of the school leader, not in the university training or the context within which the school leader operates” (p. 274).

While arguing that there existed a void of derailment research within higher education settings, Bogue (1994) nonetheless suggested that the factors associated with presidential derailments in higher education might well correspond to the “character flaws” analysis offered of superintendents by Calabrese and Roberts (2001). Specifically, he suggested a review of both trade publications in higher education and the popular press might lead one to wonder if higher education executives had left their integrity at the doorstep of the ivory tower. In citing a number of articles that focused on improper behaviors or ineffective skill sets as derailing factors, Bogue speculated that derailment research conducted within the realm of the higher education enterprise might expose a theme of vanished virtues. He noted, “Strangely missing

from the research cited by the Center for Creative Leadership is any mention of those leaders who derailed their careers because they abandoned their integrity” (p. 7).

Statement of the Problem

If the for-profit business research literature has found that leaders make a difference, there is little question that presidents in higher education make a difference in the lives of their institutions. Birnbaum (1992) suggested that college presidents make a difference in the lives of their institutions in both substantive ways (e.g., directing the strategic path of the institution over the course of years) and symbolic ways (e.g., managing and creating institutional meaning and importance in the eyes of stakeholders through speeches and appearances). More specifically, Neumann and Neumann (1999) reported that presidential leadership style can impact both enrollment growth and endowment yield.

Glick (1992) has argued that presidential turnover, including derailments, for any institution is a financially costly event. This argument would suggest that institutions have an interest in securing presidents for long tenures. While presidential tenure studies abound, it is difficult to gain agreement on average presidential tenure length. For example, the 2002 American Council on Education report on college and university presidents across all Carnegie classification types found that the average length of service as president remained steady between the years 1986 and 2001 at approximately 6.5 years (*The American College President*, 2002). However, Padilla and Ghosh (2000) found that for Research I universities, presidential tenure rates were sharply declining. Conversely, the March 20, 2009, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, citing an American Council on Education study, reported that the “average tenure for a president has grown to 8.5 years” (Fain, 2009, p. A4). Again, regardless of the

actual average presidential tenure, the argument posited by Glick (2002) leads one to believe that institutions are interested in having presidents serve longer rather than shorter tenures.

Much of what we know about executive derailment pertains to the executive or manager who has derailed on his or her way to the top position. Since no appreciable research has been conducted on top executives who have derailed, one is left to wonder if the same themes associated with derailment in ascending managers would hold for derailment with top executives.

Further, despite more than 25 years of derailment research in the for-profit arena, there remains scant attention paid to executive derailment in non-profit organizations (Tropman & Shaefer, 2004). Again, we have no idea if the themes associated with executive derailment in the for-profit sector such as problems with interpersonal relationships (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988), failure to meet business objectives (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987), inability to build and lead a team (Kaplan, Drath & Kofodimos, 1991), and inability to change or adapt (Kaplan, Drath & Kofodimos, 1991) are generalizable to the nonprofit arena. Finally, and specific to the present study, there has been no research on derailment in higher education, as a specific nonprofit sector, or on the concept of presidential derailment (Bogue, 1994).

While we know that the higher education president is important (Birnbaum, 1992; Neumann & Neumann, 1999) and turnover in the presidency is costly to the institution (Glick, 2002), we know very little about the factors associated with presidential derailments in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

As stated previously, derailment research findings in the for-profit business world and emerging since the 1980s and across cultures have suggested four “enduring derailment themes,” (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996, p. 16). These themes, problems with interpersonal relationships, failure to meet business objectives, inability to build and lead a team, and inability to change or adapt during a transition, represent the bulk of what we know about executive derailment. In addition, and representing the limited derailment research completed to date in the non-profit educational setting, Calabrese and Roberts (2001) suggested that individual character flaws were substantive factors associated with derailments among school superintendents. These themes are addressed more completely in Chapter II.

While these themes do not constitute a formal prescriptive theory of derailment, they do provide conceptual insights into what is known about the factors surrounding derailment in organizations. Given the lack of research related to derailment in the higher education context, an exploratory descriptive study of the phenomenon was most appropriate. Using these themes, this study aimed to explore the factors associated with presidential derailments at private liberal arts higher education institutions.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to describe those factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailments at selected private, liberal arts higher education institutions. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What factors are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?

2. What events are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?

Significance of the Study

The present study begins to build a literature on presidential derailment in private, liberal arts college settings that does not currently exist. The exploration of this phenomenon more fully not only adds to the knowledge base but also serves as informing research for higher education institutions in the area of leadership development. In addition, the exploration of derailment in the higher education arena can provide insights to governing boards as they search for and screen presidential candidates. Specifically, since presidential turnover is costly to institutions (Glick, 2002), understanding the factors associated with presidential derailments will provide insights into possible problematic characteristics of presidential prospects.

Further, this study extends the existing research on derailment. Previous derailment research primarily has focused on executives and managers on their way to the top position in the organization (Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). The present study extends this research to include derailment at the top level of the institution. Figure 1-1 provides a visual representation of the focus of the present study within the context of previous derailment research.

Definition of Presidential Derailment

For the purposes of the present study, presidential derailment is defined as having occurred when the president leaves his or her role non-voluntarily, prior to having completed five years in the position, due to a perceived inability to perform as expected or fulfill role requirements.

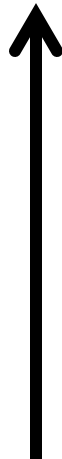
Focus of Previous Research:
Executive Derailment in For - Profit
Business

Managerial Position

Upper Level
Management

Mid Level
Management

Entry Level
Management



*Time –
Executive
derailment
can occur
during
multiple
positions
within the
organization*

Career Path

Focus of Present Research:
Presidential Derailment in Higher
Education

Academic Position

The Academic
President

Dean/
Vice President

Professor/
Director



*Time –
Presidential
Derailment
occurs within
five years of
obtaining top
academic
position*

Career Path

Figure 1-1: Focus of Previous and Present Derailment Research

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited in two ways. First, since the study sought an in-depth understanding of the factors associated with presidential derailments in selected private, liberal arts institutions, the number of institutions studied (breadth) was limited. Second, while it was assumed that respondents who agreed to be interviewed would be forthcoming, the study asked questions about an institutionally sensitive event (presidential derailment), and the interviews may have elicited answers designed to protect the institution or the individuals involved, or both.

Delimitations of the Study

Participation in the study was delimited to a convenience sample of four private higher education institutions. While seeking rich understanding of the presidential derailment

phenomena in these settings, the findings are applicable only to these four settings, and may not apply to other private liberal arts institutions.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the study and includes the statement of the problem, along with the research questions, the study purpose, the significance of the study, the limitations and delimitations of the study, as well as the definitions used in the study. In Chapter II, the relevant literature on derailment and higher education is reviewed. Chapter III details the methods and procedures used in the study including the research design, the site and populations, procedures followed, data collection, data analysis processes, and issues of data trustworthiness. Chapter IV provides the specific findings of the study related to the research questions. The final chapter, Chapter V, presents a discussion of the findings in relation to the conceptual framework as presented in Chapter II, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Let no president assume that his office does not make a difference . . . it enjoys unique influence and prestige simply because no matter how democratic a society of scholars may be or however consultative its processes, the role of chief executive remains indispensable (p. 32).

- Harold W. Dodds (1962)
President, Princeton University, 1933-57

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to describe those factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailments at selected private, liberal arts higher education institutions. This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature and is divided into four main sections. First, a brief review of the relevant literature related to leadership effectiveness is examined. Second, the literature related to the phenomenon of executive derailment within the for-profit business sector is analyzed. Third, research related to derailment within the non-profit sector, although limited, is highlighted. The fourth section of the literature review discusses the conceptual framework that was employed during the study. A summary of the information provided is included.

Leadership Effectiveness

The concept of leadership is intermingled with the very development of human civilization. One can find the “early Egyptian hieroglyphics for leadership (seshemet), leader (seshemu), and follower (shemu) from over 5000 years ago. . .” which “. . . testify to the durability of these concepts” (Burke & Cooper 2006, p. xi). Today, it would appear that interest

in all aspects of leadership continues to grow. In 2003, for example, Winum reported that a google.com search for the key word leadership produced 9,450,000 references. In March 2009, that same search yielded 213,000,000 references. For-profit businesses now are spending over \$50 billion annually on training and development programs for employees with a full 30% of learning and development budgets spent on leadership development programs (Bersin & Associates, 2006). And such impressive outlays of capital are aligned with perceptions that leadership matters. The Center for Creative Leadership and *CEO Magazine* studied issues and needs related to leadership as perceived by CEOs (Center for Creative Leadership, 2002). Over seven hundred and fifty CEOs responded to a 20-question survey. The findings included:

- Seventy-nine percent of CEOs viewed leadership development as either “the most” or “one of the top five” factors in securing competitive advantage;
- Ninety percent of CEOs reported being “actively involved” with leadership development within their organizations;
- Sixty-one percent of CEOs stated that leadership succession was a top concern.

That leaders impact their organizations is widely accepted (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Studies have shown, for instance, that the experience of the general manager can impact a firm’s performance (Gupta & Govindarajan, 1984); that the more diverse a top management team, the better the firm’s performance (Murray, 1989); and, that the size of the top management team is positively associated with firm performance (Haleblian & Finkelstein, 1993). Work teams that are deemed successful, high employee morale, and peak workplace performance all have been shown to be associated with effective leaders (Burke & Cooper, 2006).

So what, then, constitute the aptitudes and attitudes that evidence leadership effectiveness? For the answers to this question one can turn to an overwhelming supply of

writing from biographies to poetry, all of which are informing, and many times delightful in expression. One also can investigate the voluminous business literature, and for the purposes of the present study, scholarship reflecting the nature of leadership within the American academy. And while the span of writings on the nature of effective leadership is staggering, there appears to be little consensus with respect to the full nature of effective leadership.

Bolt (1996), suggested that effective leadership is comprised of competencies in three areas: business, leadership skills, and personal effectiveness. Boal and Hooijberg (2001) stated that effective leadership is comprised of three factors: absorptive capacity, or the ability to learn and apply new material or findings; adaptive capacity, or the ability to change due to context; and, managerial wisdom, or maintaining a discerning and intuitive perspective in varying conditions. More well-known through the popular press, Stephen Covey (1996), stated that effective leaders perform three basic roles: pathfinding, or creating a vision and mission for the organization; aligning, or assuring that organization structure, systems, and operations contribute to that vision and mission; and, empowering, or sparking the dormant talents, creativity, and aptitudes in others to accomplish the organizational mission.

In an attempt to identify “strategic leader skill sets for officers required in the post-September 11th environment,” (p. 1), Wong (2003), writing for the U.S. Army War College, reviewed both civilian as well as military strategic leadership literature and suggested six “strategic leadership metacompetencies” for effective leaders (p. 5). Specifically, the metacompetencies for effective leaders were:

1. Identity. Identity is the “ability to gather self feedback, to form accurate self-perceptions; and to change one’s self-concept as appropriate,” (p. 6);

2. Mental Agility. The ability to scan the environment, process information systematically, envision the future impact of that information on the organization, and adapt and implement learning mechanisms to alter organizational processes, structure, and behaviors (p. 7);
3. Cross-cultural Savvy. The ability to see perspectives outside of his or her own boundaries – including not only national, religious, societal boundaries, but also political, economic, and organizational boundaries (p. 7);
4. Interpersonal Maturity. The ability to empower (involving others when appropriate), to be persuasive and not authoritative; to be consensus builders and keen negotiators (p. 8);
5. World-class Warrior. Despite the military allusion, this metacompetency suggests that effective leaders have the ability to fully understand their work, their organization, their competitors, and their contexts (p. 9);
6. Professional Astuteness. Effective leaders should be ambitious, but for the organization and not for self. Ultimately, effective leaders need to think of organization and others first and himself or herself second (p. 10).

In the academic setting, Bogue (1994) wrote a poetic and informing work which utilized the leader as designer metaphor. “And what,” he asked, “are the ideals that will enable us to design environments in which our colleagues and our colleges reach the far edge of their promise. . .?” (p. xiii). Among the leadership qualities that comprised his answer are honor, dignity, candor, compassion, courage, a habit of curiosity, an expectation of excellence, and a servant mindset.

Noting that the academic setting is one in which collegiality has a vibrant history, Robert Birnbaum (1992), suggested that effective academic leadership is not only a function of hard work, team approaches, and communicative abilities, but also is tightly connected to the level of presidential support afforded by strategic constituencies, such as the faculty.

So, while we know that leadership is a concept that has been with us since the dawn of civilization, and we recognize today that leadership training is a multi-billion dollar per year industry supported by CEO perceptions that leaders and leadership development are critically important, there remains much less consensus surrounding the factors associated with effective leadership. As Day and Halpin (2001) stated, “Leadership is said to be everything and nothing. Decades of scientific study have yet to yield a single definition that fully captures the nature of leadership, much less articulate a definitive approach to developing it” (p. 1).

Executive Derailment Within the For-Profit Business Sector

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Center for Creative Leadership in North Carolina conducted and published a number of studies that focused on the issue of executive derailment in the for-profit business sector. The majority of these studies focused on executive derailment within the United States; however, later comparative studies analyzed the differences and similarities between executive derailment findings in the United States and in Europe (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). The bulk of this executive derailment research has been performed utilizing both qualitative methods and mixed-methods. Specifically, the methodologies most often employed have been to ask supervisors to reflect on employees who have derailed and offer factors associated with those derailments. Additionally, these supervisors have been asked to rank pre-populated sets of personal attributes for both a derailed employee and a successful employee. This research typically has studied the executive derailment phenomenon by examining those situations in which individual managers were on track to become part of the top management team but derailed prior to that occurrence.

These executive derailment studies revealed four dominant themes (Table 2-1). These themes are classified as: 1) Problems with Interpersonal Relationships; 2) Failure to Meet Business Objectives; 3) Inability to Build and Lead a Team, and; 4) Inability to Change or Adapt During a Transition (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

Problems With Interpersonal Relationships

Problems with interpersonal relationships has been reported as a major theme within the executive derailment literature and accounts for most of the negative personality characteristics that would cause an executive to experience problems during a career. Within this theme are executives who are described by their supervisors as being, “insensitive, manipulative, critical, demanding, authoritarian, self-isolating, or aloof,” (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996, p. 16).

Specifically, problems with interpersonal relationships are those flaws that derail an executive based on the social context of work. In other words, those executives who derail based on problems with interpersonal relationships may very well be task or content competent, but, ultimately fail to interact appropriately with colleagues, supervisors, or subordinates. Many of these executives have been described as either manipulative or insensitive (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). Other studies have highlighted terms such as ruthless, too ambitious, or unwilling to communicate (Hollenbeck & McCall, 2001).

Another key point with respect to problems with interpersonal relationships pertains to workplace culture and context. In 1998, Lombardo and McCauley studied three hundred and thirty-five managers in eight large corporations representing multiple industries and asked them to complete a survey based on their perceptions of the work of a subordinate manager. The survey items were constructed based on concepts “derived from qualitative studies of

Table 2-1: Enduring Derailment Themes Within The For-Profit Business Sector

(adapted and added to from Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996, p. 17)

<i>Theme</i>	McCall & Lombardo (1983)	Morrison, et. al. (1987)	Lombardo & McCauley (1988)	Leslie & Van Velsor, USA (1996)	Leslie & Van Velsor Europe (1996)	Hollenbeck & McCall (2001)
<i>Problems with Interpersonal Relationships</i>	Insensitive to others Cold, aloof, arrogant Overly ambitious	Poor relations Too ambitious	Problems with interpersonal relations Isolates self	Poor working relations Authoritarian	Poor working relations Organizational isolation Authoritarian	Too ruthless Promoted himself too much
<i>Failure to Meet Business Objectives</i>	Betrayal of trust Poor performance	Performance problems	Lack of follow-through	Poor performance	Poor performance	
<i>Inability to Build and Lead a Team</i>	Failure to staff effectively	Cannot manage subordinates	Difficulty molding a staff	Inability to build and lead a team	Inability to build and lead a team	Not tough enough
<i>Inability to Change or Adapt During Transition</i>	Unable to adapt to a boss with a different style Unable to think strategically	Unable to adapt to a boss or culture Not strategic	Strategic differences with management Difficulty making strategic decisions	Unable to develop or adapt Conflict with upper management	Unable to adapt or develop Conflict with upper management	Haphazard repatriation

executive derailment” (p. 30). The findings suggested that problems with interpersonal relationships were correlated with derailment in some organizations but not in others. In those organizations with cultures that value teamwork and team-building, having problems with interpersonal relationships could derail the executive more easily. However, this suggestion is a bit suspect as the researchers decided only after the study to group the eight companies into culture categories based solely on what they knew about the companies prior to conducting the research.

Failure To Meet Business Objectives

The research in the for-profit business sector clearly shows that bottom line and organizational results are factors in executive derailment. The inability to meet performance expectations has been documented as not following through (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988), and being overly ambitious without evidencing results (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). Indeed, in their qualitative study of European supervisors reflecting on derailed subordinates, Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) had an interviewee offer the following account:

“He was very ambitious and spent a lot of time demonstrating it by telling others, ‘I want to replace Mr. X or Y: I deserve it. I’m in a position to replace him.’ But there was no demonstration of competence to accompany this ambition. Over time, he demonstrated that he was less competent for the job he had. . . He is not trusted by internal customers in the field. They didn’t see him as credible, knowledgeable enough to be competent” (p. 20).

A crucial understanding that has emerged from the executive derailment research in the for-profit business sector is that attributes considered professional assets early in careers can become liabilities as one advances organizationally. For instance, in their early careers, most of the derailed executives were applauded for their ability to meet business objectives. Of course, such successes typically occurred within relatively stable environments and were based on

individual decision and implementation activities. As the executive was promoted, the working environment typically became more unstable (i.e., more decisions are made with less data), and decisions made by the executive typically impacted more of the organization. If the executive could not adjust to such changes, the original professional asset of being able to meet business objectives became a liability that ultimately led to derailment (Kovach, 1986).

This particular theme highlights a deficiency in the methodology employed for the vast majority of the executive derailment research. Namely, the research has employed a qualitative methodology in which senior executives were asked retrospectively to assess the qualities or factors that led to the derailment of subordinate managers. It is not a stretch to think that in market-driven companies, senior executives could, especially in retrospect, easily perceive nuanced factors unrelated to business objectives as nonetheless being related to a failure to meet business objectives. In situations where bottom line pressures loom regularly, it is conceivable that superiors may report flaws incorrectly as being related to a failure to meet business objectives when, in fact, the flaws were actually related more to interpersonal relationships. This, of course, is not to suggest that interpersonal relationships are not related to the ability to meet business objectives. Rather, the suggestion is that the methodology employed has not been as sensitive to the relatedness and the distinctiveness of these factors as one would like.

Inability To Lead A Team

Each of the derailment themes is closely related to one another. For instance, the inability to lead a team could lead to a failure to meet business objectives. Or, problems with interpersonal relationships could cause an executive to be unable to lead a team. In over 25% of

all derailment research, interviewees cited the inability to lead a team as the fatal flaw that led to executive derailment (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

In her 1986 writing, Barbara Kovach highlighted the change in expectations that accompanied movement in career phase or organizational level. Specifically, she drew distinctions between early career/functional orientation and the later career/organizational orientation. As executives grew into later career/organizational positions, it was expected that their orientation also would grow to work more effectively within the larger organizational context and manage multiple operational systems and teams of people. Typically, such traits needed not be present early in careers and, if not adopted later in careers, could cause problems and ultimate derailment for executives.

Additionally, Leslie and Van Velsor (1996), studied 20 senior executives from 15 Fortune 500 companies in the United States, and found that a transition in the role of the senior executive with respect to leading teams had occurred. “Today, the leadership skills required are different, even from five years ago. The expectations of people around style have changed greatly. A manager can no longer rely on position power to get the job done. People want to see their leaders, hear them talk from their hearts, roll their sleeves up and spontaneously and genuinely build that trust” (p. 21).

One drawback of the Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) study involved the issue of gender and may be especially significant as related to this finding of team building. The researchers asked the respondents to “think of two managers they knew well” (p. 4). One manager was the successful manager and one was the derailed manager. While 69% of the 20 senior executives interviewed were male, a full 95% of those that they reported as derailed managers were also male. One wonders if the results of the study might have been different if the researchers had

encouraged the executives to think of a male and a female and to describe those factors that were associated with their successes and their derailments. With the understanding that the issue of leadership style has changed (as cited above), one wonders if the senior executives would have perceived female derailed managers as being poor team leaders.

Inability To Change Or Adapt During A Transition

The inability to adapt to change or to a transition can be a “quiet thief” that derails an executive. The notion of the “quiet thief” is used with this derailment theme because the signs of this flaw may not be visible, even to the derailed executive and, in many cases, derailed executives are left wondering what happened to their careers. According to the derailment research, this theme has several components, including: failure to adapt to a new boss with a different style (McCall & Lombardo, 1983); an inability to adapt to the demands of a new job, a new culture, or changes in the marketplace (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987), and; an overdependence on a single skill and/or a failure to acquire a new skill (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

In early executive derailment studies, this theme typically referred to an executive’s inability to change or adapt to a new boss or supervisor’s style. As executive derailment research has evolved, however, more recent studies point to the inability of the derailed executive to “change one’s management style toward a more participative or team-based approach” (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

There is also some evidence that this derailing attribute may be the most difficult one to amend or sidestep. As Leslie and Van Velsor wrote in their 1996 study of North American and European executives, “In many cases, the senior executive described repeated efforts to give the

(derailed) managers feedback on areas for improvement. For whatever reason, the derailed managers were unable or unwilling to learn from or apply the feedback” (p. 23).

While the four broad themes listed in this literature review have been found in multiple studies, it should be noted that within each of these four themes are found nuances between studies and evolutions of meaning over time. There is evidence that the themes are not static, but rather, dynamic phenomena that may not be generalizeable across all for-profit settings.

Executive Derailment within the Non-Profit Sector

As previously stated, the bulk of executive derailment research has been conducted in the for-profit business sector. What we know about the concept of derailment is, in overwhelmingly large measure, a product of that research. While there has been scant attention paid to executive derailment in the non-profit sector (and, more specifically, the higher education sector), there has been some scholarship focused on the conceptual understanding of derailment and how derailment may occur in settings beyond business. It is to the derailment research external to the for-profit business world that we now turn.

In 2004, Tropman and Shaefer, reviewed Van Velsor and Leslie’s 1995 study entitled, “Why executives derail: Perspectives across time and cultures,” John Glasser’s 1994 account of a well-known leadership scandal at the United Way of America, and 75 articles “from the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other papers that detailed the stories of executives who had ‘flamed out.’” From these reviews, Tropman and Shaefer (2004) suggested that executives within the non-profit sector could experience four levels of “executive decompensation.” They distinguished derailment as simply one level or stage (stage 3) within a typology of executive decompensation. At the lowest level and least offensive to the organization was the notion of the

“executive detour.” Behaviors that corresponded with this level included spending far too much time working on documents in their in-box, or only communicating with staff through the forwarding of official emails received from others. Regularly calling meaningless meetings or traveling continuously could also be signs of an executive detour.

The next level of executive decompensation was the notion of periderailment (p. 167). In this stage, the executive had not appropriately altered his or her detouring behaviors and continued in such behavior patterns for extended periods of time. As a consequence, both the career of the executive and the ability of the organization to function properly were further harmed. As executives typically have a good bit of autonomy in how to work, organizations and their boards could find it difficult to appropriately assess either detouring or periderailing executives. In many instances, these executives may have been promoted (p. 167).

According to Tropman and Shaefer (2004), level three of executive decompensation was derailment and level four was flameout/calamity. The difference between these two levels stemmed from the impact felt by both the executive and the organization. With both derailment and flameout/calamity, the executive lost his or her position, but the flameout/calamity was much more “flagrant, more public, and more costly. . .than derailment” (p. 168).

It needs to be stated at this point that the Tropman and Shaefer (2004) framework appears helpful when one is assessing the impact or consequences of the decision to end the employment relationship with an executive. However, with respect to the factors or reasons associated with the departure, there does not appear to be a great deal of value associated with making the derailment/flameout/calamity distinctions. As the primary purpose of the present study was to assess the factors associated with derailment as defined in chapter one, the

framework as presented by Tropman and Shaefer (2004) could serve to categorize the type of derailment, but would not lend insight into the factors associated with that derailment.

However, based on their reviews of the literature and newspaper accounts, Tropman and Shaefer (2004) did offer causes inherent in the executive flameout/calamity within the non-profit sector. They categorized their derailment causes into the “Five Cs”: characteristics, competencies, conditions, contexts, and change. Characteristics referred to the personal attributes and individual temperament of the executive. Competencies referred to the aptitudes and skills that an executive brings to a position. Conditions referred to the culture and structures of the organization. Contexts referred to the external environment. Change referred to the ongoing process of transformation that both the individual and the organization must experience over time.

Specifically, characteristics and competencies referred to the individual traits and/or behaviors exhibited by executives of non-profits that caused their derailment (or flameout/calamity). Those derailment causes found within the categories of characteristics and competencies included arrogance, overconfidence, being highly persuasive, and having a need for excessive ego stroking (Light, 2002). The other three categories of conditions, contexts, and change were elements of the organization and beyond that created environments within which executives could derail. Derailment factors associated with conditions and contexts included executive excesses and the pressures of dealing with difficult social problems each day. Finally, those derailment factors attributable to change were a failure to deal effectively in a fast-paced environment or being unable to assess and act on nuanced information in a slower-paced environment (Tropman and Shaefer, 2004).

In 2001, Calabrese and Roberts assessed derailments among school superintendents through a study of three cases of derailed school leaders. The study was poorly reported in that no methodology was described. In addition, while the study draws on “an analysis of more than 50 recent cases. . .,” there was no description of who was studied in the cases or how the cases were analyzed. In spite of these methodological shortcomings, the study represented one of the few focused on executive derailment in a non-profit educational setting. The findings suggested that “character flaws” were substantial factors associated with the school superintendent derailments. Specifically, they found that issues of personal integrity and unethical behaviors were more relevant in understanding superintendent derailments than was their productivity or the contextual circumstances of the school systems.

While the terminology is somewhat differentiated between the for-profit and non-profit executive derailment research, one can still ascertain similar themes. Issues of change management, or arrogance, or excess ambition are seen in both research streams and give some sense of operational clarity when assessing the concept of derailment.

Conceptual Framework

Although not prescriptive, the findings from the executive derailment research within the for-profit sector provide the most appropriate starting place for a conceptual framework for the factors related to derailment within the higher education presidency. Specifically, the four enduring themes as cited by Leslie and Van Velsor (1996), suggested that executive derailments, by and large, can be categorized as being associated with one or more of the following:

1. Problems with Interpersonal Relationships;
2. Failure to Meet Business Objectives;

3. Inability to Lead a Team;
4. Inability to Change or Adapt During a Transition.

Figure 2-1 is the conceptual model of presidential derailment in higher education utilized for this study. This model utilized adapted factors from the enduring themes from the for-profit executive derailment research as well as a factor generated from the limited non-profit research. It is suggested that presidential derailments in the private, liberal arts higher education setting will be associated with one, or more, of the five themes listed in Figure 2-1. Of the five themes cited in Figure 2-1, four are adapted from the for-profit executive derailment research conducted previously. Those themes are: “Problems with Interpersonal Relationships;” “Failure to Meet Institutional Objectives;” “Inability to Lead Key Constituents;” and, “Inability to Change or Adapt.” The fifth theme, “Failure of the President to Act Ethically,” is one that was suggested by Calabrese and Roberts (2001) in their study of superintendents, and more pointedly has been stated as a possible derailing factor in higher education by Bogue (1994).

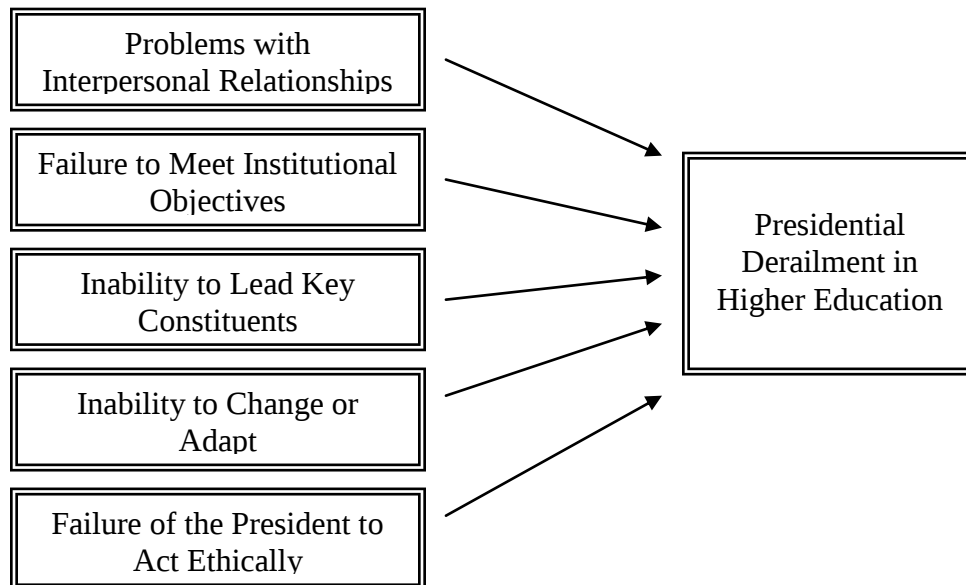


Figure 2-1: Proposed Factors Associated with Presidential Derailment

At this point, it is worth explaining the decision to employ a conceptual model most closely associated with for-profit executive derailment research for the present study focused on presidential derailment in private, liberal arts higher education settings. As stated earlier, Tropman and Shaefer (2004) suggested the “Five C’s,” or five causes for non-profit executive derailment (p. 170). However, in creating the conceptual model for this study, the researcher made the decision to utilize the collection of heavily researched findings from the for-profit executive derailment literature (see Table 2-1) as opposed to the findings suggested by the more limited Tropman and Shaefer (2004) review of the literature and selected cases.

Summary

There has been little research conducted on executive derailment within higher education. The bulk of derailment research has been completed through the Center for Creative Learning in North Carolina and has focused on executives on their way up the corporate ladder in for-profit businesses. While there is little to suggest that this research, combined with the small amount of research that has been completed in the non-profit arena, is adequate or appropriate to explain presidential derailments within higher education, this study utilized a conceptual framework adapted from these enduring themes of previous for-profit executive derailment research to describe the factors associated with presidential derailments in private, liberal arts higher education institutions.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to describe those factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailments at private, liberal arts higher education institutions. The research questions which guided the study were:

1. What factors are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?
2. What events are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?

This chapter addresses the research design, research sites and populations, sources of data, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures employed in the study. Concluding the chapter, the issues of data trustworthiness, or reliability and validity, are addressed.

Research Design

Both the purpose of the study and the lack of presidential derailment research in higher education most appropriately called for an exploratory, descriptive design using qualitative methods. Specifically, the primary aim of the study was to gain detailed insight into the perceived factors that led to presidential derailment at private, liberal arts higher education institutions. As Creswell (2005) suggested, one should utilize a qualitative methodology when one is aiming to gain “a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon” (p. 45). Further, the purpose of the study and, according to Bradley (1993), of qualitative research, “is not to establish

statistical generalizability, but to broaden the scope of situations investigated in detail by the researcher and thus widen the scope of understanding” (p. 438). A qualitative approach “allows extensive probing in areas that have not been well studied and in which tightly structured, nonqualitative approaches are difficult to use because of a lack of theory or research literature to guide tightly structured investigation” (Rosenblatt and Fischer, 1993, p. 173). Further, Creswell (1994) identified four characteristics of a qualitative research problem that exist in the present study: (1) the research is exploratory; (2) the variables important to understand the phenomenon are unknown; (3) the context of the phenomenon is important to understand the phenomenon; and, (4) the phenomenon may lack a theory base for study.

Among the myriad qualitative design approaches available to employ, the present study called most appropriately for the case study design. According to Creswell (2005), an appropriate use of the case study design occurs when “. . . the focus of a qualitative study may be a specific issue, with a case (or cases) used to illustrate the issue” (p. 439). Such a design was more specifically termed an “. . . instrumental case, because it serves the purpose of illuminating a particular issue” (p. 439). Studies, like the present, which employ more than one instrumental case, are referred to as a multiple instrumental case study, or a “collective case study” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 437). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) further state that the collective case study should be employed when the researcher has less interest in any particular case and endeavors to “jointly study a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon. . .” (p. 437). In the present study, the “particular issue,” of interest, as stated by Creswell (2005) or the “phenomenon,” as stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), was the concept of presidential derailment.

Research Sites and Populations

Four private, liberal arts institutions having experienced a presidential derailment within the last two years were identified. The sample was drawn from recommendations by Douglas D. Mason, partner with the Chicago, IL, institutional advancement consulting firm of Gonser Gerber Tinker Stuhr (GGTS). GGTS is one of the oldest consulting firms in the United States providing counsel on institutional advancement, board development, and strategic planning to over 200 higher education clients since 1950. Mr. Mason agreed to assist the researcher in identifying private, liberal arts institutions where presidential derailments occurred and where relationships existed between GGTS and the institution which might aid in securing participation. Likewise, the researcher received agreement from Dr. Allen E. Koenig, senior consultant with Robert H. Perry and Associates and co-founder of the Registry for College and University Presidents to assist in the identification of study institutions and individuals.

Further, the researcher utilized the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the National Association of Independent College and Universities website to identify private, liberal arts institutions which experienced recent presidential departures. To clarify the nature of the presidential departure and to ascertain if the institution was eligible for participation in the study, study prospects were researched further using institutional news releases and internet searches.

To be an eligible institution for the purposes of the study, the institution had to identify itself as a private, liberal arts educational institution which granted baccalaureate degrees. Further, the institution must have experienced a presidential derailment within the previous two years. To qualify as a derailment, the president of the institution had to leave, not of his or her choosing, within five years of being hired.

As the purpose of the study was to describe those factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailments at private, liberal arts higher education institutions, analyzing data from multiple and varied perspectives was important. Multiple viewpoints served to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon was being seen (Glick, 1992). Thus, perspectives on the presidential derailments were ascertained from sitting presidents, derailed presidents, a governing board member, vice presidents, consultants and other informed participants at each participating institution. The process of “snowballing” or “chaining” also was used as the researcher asked each study participant if they knew of others at the institution (e.g., faculty members, executive coaches, or others) who had informed perspectives on the derailment of the president. According to Creswell (2005), the snowball or chaining process is an efficient method to recruit informed study participants. This process led to two additional interviews with executive coaches who were hired at the encouragement of the governing boards to assess and strengthen the leadership skills of the president.

Sources of Data

One of the more common qualitative methodologies, audio-taped, in-depth, one-on-one interviewing, was employed as the primary method for the study. According to Seidman (1998), “the primary way a researcher can investigate an educational organization, institution, or process is through the experience of the individual people, the ‘others’ who make up the organization or carry out the process” (p. 4). Accordingly, “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 1998, p. 3). The purpose of the interview, Patton (2002), suggests “. . .is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. . .to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind,

to gather their stories” (p. 341). “The goal,” according to Seidman (1998), “is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (p. 9).

Creswell (2005) stated that one-on-one interviews have two main advantages. First, interviews “provide useful information when you cannot directly observe participants” (p. 215). Second, interviews “permit participants to describe detailed personal information” (p. 215).

For each of the interviews, the researcher endeavored to adhere to the following interviewing guidelines as stated by Dana, Dana, Kelsay, Thomas, and Tippins (1992):

- Asking short and precise questions;
- Asking questions one at a time;
- Avoiding questions to which answers are either implied or given; and,
- Avoiding the use of language and jargon that may make a respondent uncomfortable.

Further, Creswell (2005) offered a list of post-interview questions that the researcher aimed to answer in the affirmative. These questions included:

- Did I listen more and talk less during the interview?
- Did I probe during the interview (ask to clarify and elaborate)?
- Did I keep participants focused and ask for concrete details?
- Did I withhold judgments and refrain from debating with participants about their views?
- Was I courteous and did I thank the participant after concluding the interview? (p. 219)

The interview questionnaire consisted of three questions (Appendix A):

1. What were the critical factors that led to the derailment of the president?
2. What were the critical events that led to the derailment of the president?
3. Are there other important aspects of the derailment that we have not discussed?

The final question is one that provided the participant an opportunity to offer insights not discussed based on the previous questions. Patton (2002) stated, “in the spirit of emergent interviewing, open-ended interviewing, it’s important in formal interviews to provide an opportunity for the interviewee to have the final say. . .” (p. 379).

To obtain additional information or to seek clarification, sub-questions, or probes, were used during the interviews. Elaborating probes were those sub-questions designed to obtain additional information and included queries such as, “tell me more,” or “could you expand on that response?” Clarifying probes were designed to gain more detail during the interview and included queries such as, “could you explain that idea in more detail?” or “tell me about the discussions you had with him/her?” (Creswell, 2005, p. 218).

The in-depth interview procedure employed was standardized for all participants, open-ended in format, and lasted approximately one half to one hour. Study participants were asked each question in the same way and in the same order to provide appropriate comparisons across interviews (Patton, 2002). There were four major reasons for using standardized, open-ended interviews:

1. The exact instrument used in the evaluation is available for inspection by those who will use the findings of the study;
2. Variation among interviewers can be minimized where a number of different interviewers must be used;
3. The interview is highly focused so that interviewee time is used efficiently;
4. Analysis is facilitated by making responses easy to find and compare (Patton, 2002, p. 346).

To facilitate data analysis, interviews were audio-tape recorded with the consent of participants and verbatim transcripts were produced after all interviews were completed. As

Patton (2002) argued, “. . .the actual things said by real people. That’s the prize sought by the qualitative inquirer” (p. 380).

In addition to the data emergent from the in-depth one-on-one interviewing, interview field notes served as a data source. According to Creswell (2005), field notes are “text (words) recorded by the researcher during and observation in a qualitative study” (p. 213). Bogdan and Biklen, (1998) suggested that field notes include written descriptions of participants, the physical setting, particular actions and reactions of participants, and researcher reflections on what has happened. “The use of the tape recorder does not eliminate the need for taking notes, but does allow you to concentrate on taking strategic and focused notes, rather than attempting verbatim notes,” (Patton, 2002, p. 383). Interview field notes assisted in data analysis in at least four ways:

1. Interview notes assisted the interviewer in identifying appropriate interview probes or sub-questions;
2. Reviewing notes before transcripts were completed stimulated early insights into themes that were relevant to pursue in subsequent interviews;
3. Taking notes about what was said facilitated later analysis;
4. Notes were a back-up in the event of a recording malfunction (Patton, 2002, p. 383).

Media accounts in the form of newspaper stories and institutional news releases related to the presidential derailment also were used for the purposes of data analysis. Finally, the initial plan for the study was to include for analysis institutional documents, such as governing board meeting minutes and other institutional memoranda, when available. While such data can present an “unrealistically glowing picture” of the institution and of the presidential derailment, Bogdan and Biklen (1992), suggested that such data sources should be viewed favorably as they

provide an “official perspective” of the institution and the event under question (p. 136).

However, none of the four participating institutions agreed to allow governing board meeting minutes or other memoranda to be reviewed by the researcher. During the course of the study, though, one derailed president’s wife agreed to allow the use of her personal journal as a source of data.

Data Collection Procedures

Study approval was granted from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the start of data collection (Appendix B). Informed Consent Forms (Appendix C) for the study participants were developed in accordance with IRB guidelines and were distributed for signing by participants prior to interviews being conducted.

Institutions and individuals were assured that participation would remain voluntary throughout the duration of the interview and study and that the use of pseudonyms would be used to keep all information provided confidential. Further, participants were assured that all data would be kept securely in a locked office within the UTK Claxton Education Building office number 319.

The researcher, in collaboration with Douglas D. Mason, partner at GGTS, extended an invitation to participate in the study to the sitting president of each eligible institution. Depending on the nature and strength of the relationship between the institution and GGTS, the sitting president was contacted either by Douglas D. Mason via telephone or by sending a letter (Appendix D) from the researcher asking for his or her participation in the study. This communication explained the study purpose, invited participation in the study, and informed the presidents that each would receive a follow-up telephone call from the researcher to answer

questions, schedule an interview time, and ask for recommendations on board member, vice presidential, or other participants for the study. These initial contacts were important not only to secure the participants, but also to build rapport with the potential participants. According to Patton (2002), “Rapport means that I respect the people being interviewed, so what they say is important because of who is saying it.” An aim of these initial contacts was to demonstrate respect both in tone and in communication method.

Once the sitting president agreed to participate, he or she was asked to recommend a board member, vice president, or other informed individual for participation in the study. The researcher then contacted via letter or email message the recommended governing board member and the vice president to explain the study purpose, invite their participation, and inform each that a follow-up phone call would be placed to answer questions and to schedule an interview time. Governing board members, vice presidents, and other informed participants were individuals who were present during the derailment of the president.

For each participating institution, individual, one-on-one interviews were conducted. All interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participant and lasted approximately one half to one hour. Prior to commencing with the formal interview, the researcher reminded the participants of the purpose of the study and reviewed and obtained participant signatures on the informed consent form. As the subject of presidential derailment could lead to sensitive discussions, participants were told of the safeguards which were employed to provide confidentiality to them and their institutions throughout the study and the reporting of findings. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggested, “Early in the interview you try to briefly inform the subject of your purpose, and make assurances (if they are necessary) that what is said in the interview will be treated confidentially,” (p. 97).

Also, prior to the formal interview, the researcher asked each participant if he or she minded having the interview audio-taped. Again, as the subject of presidential derailment could lead to sensitive discussions, this question was dealt with carefully. Specifically and as Bogdan and Biklen (1992) stated,

“Never record without permission. Force yourself to ask. Some subjects simply will not care if the interview is recorded. Others will ask what you intend to do with the tapes. They want assurance that private information they share with you will not be revealed to others at their expense. In addition, some people think that once their words are recorded on tape, the tapes could come back to haunt them (or get them in trouble. . .)” (p. 100).

Every effort was made to conduct interviews face-to-face. Due to the prohibitive cost of some travel and the busy schedules of the participants, there were four interviews conducted via telephone. When telephone interviews occurred, the researcher emailed the informed consent form prior to the interview and followed, as closely as possible, the same protocol as described for face-to-face interviews.

Prior to beginning interviews, the researcher searched newspaper reports and institutional news releases by using google.com, LexisNexis, and the web site of the institution. The collection of these data prior to the interviews was important for at least two reasons. First, these external communications served to provide the researcher with official context and cues with respect to the derailment. During the interviews, such contextual knowledge informed the asking of appropriate and helpful probes. Second, the analyses of these documents were informed by knowing “something about who produced them and for what reasons, in other words, the social context” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 136). Having collected and reviewed these documents prior to the interviews informed the interview and the final analyses of the documents. All 17 interviews were conducted between May 2007 and February 2009. The initial convenience sample of eligible institutions produced the four study institutions.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis,” according to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), “is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others” (p. 153). Analyzing qualitative data occurs following two general methods. On one hand, analysis of the data can be completed concurrent with the collection of the data. During this method, the analysis is, by and large, completed by the end of the data collection. On the other hand, analysis of qualitative data can be a two-step process in which the researcher first collects all data and then, after collection is complete, analyzes all data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). For the purposes of the present study, analysis of the qualitative data in the study was a blend of these two approaches. First, a preliminary and concurrent analysis occurred involving: transcribing the interviews, reading and re-reading of interview transcripts, field notes, and other documents, and identifying initial patterns and themes within the interviews, field notes and other documents (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The data sources were analyzed separately with data patterns and themes identified within each data source independently. Second, the final and more formal analyses emerged after all data were collected by coding the data, making comparisons with respect to initially identified themes and by comparing and contrasting those themes across the data sources (Patton, 2002). Such a blended approach to data analysis was suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) as appropriate for those new to qualitative research or studying a topic for the first time.

The emergent themes also were analyzed to compare and contrast with the conceptual model. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), while analyzing qualitative data for themes, “one cannot decide in a vacuum which classes [topics of themes found] are ‘right’ or ‘best.’

There must be clear linkage to the study's conceptual framework and research questions" (p. 223).

In the case of the present study, both the first and second research questions were answered by the data collected during the interviews, from field notes, media accounts, institutional news releases, and a personal journal.

Trustworthiness of Data

The present study employed the concept of data source triangulation and data method triangulation to enhance the trustworthiness of the data (Denzin, 1978). According to Patton (2002), "By triangulating . . . researchers can make substantial strides in overcoming the skepticism that greets singular methods, lone analysts, and single-perspective interpretations" (p. 556). Specifically, data source triangulation involved the comparing and contrasting of multiple perspectives within the same qualitative method. In the present study, the one-on-one interviews provided the multiple perspectives of sitting and derailed presidents, a board member, vice presidents, consultants, and other informed individuals. With respect to data method triangulation, the present study employed data which emerged from one-on-one interviews, newspaper reports, institutional news releases, field notes, and other documents (e.g., personal journal).

According to Miles and Huberman, (1994), triangulation might provide "corroboration . . . getting something like a confidence interval." However, it also may be that through triangulation the "different sources are inconsistent or even directly conflicting" (p. 267). Data triangulation, "may not lead to a single, totally consistent picture. The point is to study and understand when and why these differences appear" (Patton, 2002, p. 560). In circumstances where differences

appear, the findings may help restrain the researcher from false conclusions and perhaps may advance a new line of thinking and questions that can inform future research.

CHAPTER IV: PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to describe those factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailments at private, liberal arts higher education institutions. The research questions which guided the study were:

1. What factors are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?
2. What events are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?

The data were collected from in-depth, one-on-one interviews, field notes, institutional websites, media accounts, and a personal journal. Through inductive, thematic analyses of the data, various themes emerged. While some of the themes corresponded with the previous derailment research in the for-profit business literature, new themes also emerged. The results are presented in this chapter, along with selections from the data, incorporated to highlight themes, illustrate issues, and explain more thoroughly the study findings.

Four private, liberal arts higher education institutions having experienced a presidential derailment within the last two years served as the data collection sites. From those four institutions, 17 interviews were completed (Table 4-1). In addition, a sitting president at a fifth institution was interviewed as well as a higher education consultant not associated with any of the colleges participating in the study, and a president serving in interim fashion at a sixth institution. These interviews served as context for the concept of derailment in higher education and were not part of the data analysis for the four derailment cases presented. In all, a total of 20 interviews were completed.

Table 4-1: Interview Participant Positions By College

<i>College</i>	<i>Interview Participant Positions</i>
College I	▪ Sitting President ▪ Derailed President ▪ Vice President for Development ▪ Institutional Consultant
College II	▪ Governing Board Member ▪ Sitting President ▪ Vice President for Enrollment Management ▪ Institutional Consultant
College III	▪ Derailed President ▪ Vice President for Development ▪ Institutional Consultant ▪ Executive Coach ▪ Spouse of Derailed President
College IV	▪ Derailed President ▪ Vice President and Academic Dean ▪ Institutional Consultant ▪ Executive Coach

The participants were asked the same three questions:

1. What were the critical factors that lead to the derailment of the president?
2. What were the critical events that led to the derailment of the president?
3. Are there other important aspects of the derailment that we have not discussed?

The derailment themes presented are categorized with respect to each participating institution. In addition, themes emerging from across the study sites are highlighted. Finally, these emergent themes are compared to the conceptual framework as presented in Chapter II.

College I

The College Context

College I is a private, liberal arts college with approximately 2,200 students. It has a regional reputation as a rigorous academic institution with a strong nationally-recognized athletic

program. College I is a church-related institution, with an endowment over \$100 million, and a student to faculty ratio of 13:1. The institution is highly residential, with over 70% of students choosing to live on its single campus.

Presidential Derailment Themes

For College I, study participants included the derailed president, the sitting president, a senior administrator who had served on the cabinet with the derailed president, and a consultant who was engaged with the institution during the time of the derailment. In addition, data were collected from media sources and interview field notes. The data revealed four themes contributing to the derailment of the president.

Derailment Theme 1. Failure to meet institutional objectives. Prior to the tenure of the derailed president at College I, there was a clear sense that the institution had tremendous momentum with respect to enrollment gains and fundraising results. Specifically, one participant noted with a great deal of enthusiasm,

. . . we started to really grow as an institution in about 1992. Over the next 10 years or so we doubled our enrollment from about 1000 students to 2000. As I'm sure you know looking at institutions like ours, that's a dramatic difference. . . when the former president was leaving, in his last few years, we built a couple of buildings, the financial position of the college was very good.

Another participant stated, "the biggest change (from the previous president to the derailed president) that I saw was that the school had lost its momentum. . . they had begun a capital campaign under the new (derailed) president and it wasn't going anywhere. The growth in enrollment that we had experienced the previous decade had hit a plateau and had started to decline." Added another, "there was weakness in enrollment that was tangible, not in a big way, but it was noticeable."

From analyses of field notes, it became clear that this theme was of key importance to all who mentioned it. Not only was this theme mentioned multiple times, but it emerged from the interviews in a passionate way. All participants noting this theme did so with a good measure of expressed concern. Through body language and hand gestures which emphasized their sorrow of the missed opportunity to continue the gains in enrollment and fundraising, each was similar in expressing that College I had experienced a distressing loss of momentum which impacted the entire College I community.

However, it should be noted that the derailed president did not perceive these circumstances in similar fashion. His incredulity was expressed as follows:

I went to my wife and said, you know, this is painful. I don't understand this. We had record enrollments every year, we raised nearly \$50 million in 4 years, we built a new building every year that I've been here without borrowing a dime. We've completed a strategic plan that is a model others are looking at to say, 'wow, that's the way you're supposed to do strategic planning.' We have a Campus Master Plan that was a marvelous addition to the campus. By every objective measure the institution was moving forward. . .

Such contrasting viewpoints are, at first, difficult to understand. How might a college president and those around him or her perceive objective measures of institutional success so differently? The answer, at least partly it would appear, can be found within the second derailment theme for College I.

Derailed Theme 2. Inability to lead key constituencies. The primary factor associated with this theme was the inability of the president to form strategic relationships. An ingredient for long presidential tenure appears to be the ability to form strategic relationships with members of the governing board, faculty, community, government, alumni, parents, business world, and even students. In the course of this study, the term "strategic relationships" emerged to mean relationships with select individuals of influence and/or affluence who offer sound counsel,

provide resources and public support, assist in the implementation of college objectives, and serve as the president's buffer and champion when criticisms arise. As one participant noted,

He had the wherewithal, but he wasn't enough of the 'go to the country club, golf, sit down and have a drink with the guys' kind of president. He didn't have enough of that. I think he could have done it, but he didn't see that as a presidential role. Quite frankly, that's probably what he needed to do. He needed to build that social capital.

In addition, the same participant stated,

You know the Wednesday before Thanksgiving? Nothing gets done. I went into his office late morning and I said, 'you don't have much going on today, why don't you walk around campus, just pop your head in some offices, say hi to some folks.' He didn't do it. Now, he didn't have to do what I told him but there was something in him that wouldn't let him do that. There were those little things that I think could have torn down some walls that just didn't get done.

Similarly, another participant stated, "he didn't build a strong relationship with the Board Chair. They participated in different social events, enjoyed doing different things and he (derailed president) didn't reach out as much as I think he should have. . ."

This difficulty in leading key constituencies appeared to be related to a lack of agreement on broader philosophical issues that were evidenced early in the tenure of the derailed president. As an example of a philosophical disconnect between the president and the institutional culture, one participant stated,

I think when he (derailed president) came here, he felt very strongly that this was a more church-related institution than it really was. First of all, most of our students are a different faith than our historical church connection. We live in an area of the country that's largely a different faith than our historical church connection. He invested himself early on in our chapel and our religious program. . . He displayed his interest in religion, and his own personal Christian life. He was never quiet about that and even at his inauguration we had a ceremony in our chapel, where we had a, and this is something he really wanted, where we had people lay hands on him. And that seemed a little too demonstrative for some of our conservative, very conservative folks.

Stated the derailed president about an event that happened later in his presidency, “the Board Chair came up to me, and I could see he was upset, but I was too. And he said, ‘you are too much of a Boy Scout, stop being on your knees so much’ (referring to prayer).” Noted one of the participants, “I think he (derailed president) came in expecting the school would be more Christian and I think the school expected him to be more like the former president. . .both were surprised.” Due to this philosophical disconnect, one of the participants summed up his inability to form strategic relationships thusly,

I don't think that he ever truly committed himself to forming the strategic relationships with the board members that he needed to. I think that he thought he was doing it, but I think there was something in him that held him back from doing it and part of it might have been he didn't want to sell out. I'm speaking very candidly. We had a couple of board members with significant power, informal power, formal power, I don't care how you categorize it. They were influencers and decision makers. . .and he couldn't or wouldn't play their game.

Derailment Theme 3. Diminished governing board functionality. This theme included such factors as a display of power imbalance on the board, with a single committee or group of board members assuming too much authority on behalf of the full board, an inability on the part of the governing board to communicate effectively both internally and with the president, and an unwillingness to conduct presidential evaluations, a key board responsibility.

This theme is closely connected with College I derailment theme 2. Forming strategic relationships with the board as a collective and with individual board members assumes effort on the part of the derailed president and effort on the part of the governing board members. It is possible that diminished governing board functionality could be an inhibiting factor in the ability of the president to form strategic relationships. However, this theme is distinct from theme 2 in that the governing board at a private institution represents a separate, collective entity charged with distinct fiduciary and legal obligations. In this instance, the data revealed dysfunctions

contained within the boundaries of the collective board which created a contextual environment for the derailment. In short, the data suggested that the president's inability to form strategic relationships was a discrete factor. In addition, the data suggested that his inability to form these strategic relationships occurred within a context of board dysfunction. It is to this contextual element of the theme we will now turn.

One participant noted both the power imbalance within the board and the inability of the board to communicate effectively when he said,

The board was sort of divided because the executive committee was very aware of the problems in fit and in performance with the new president but the full board was less aware. So there was kind of a division within the board, like, 'hey we didn't know it was going so bad' . . . but the executive committee was more on the inside and understood it. In some ways that was a flaw within the board. There was sort of a communication problem within the board. . . It was a two-tiered board in many ways.

Another participant focused on the mixed communications received by the derailed president from the board. "The board made it tough, especially the last two years. They were being petulant. If he (derailed president) was decisive, they said, 'you should have consulted us.' If he wasn't decisive, they criticized him."

The derailed president confessed with a good bit of sadness to never fully understanding the reasons for his dismissal when he stated,

In the end. . . I don't know, I still don't know why the executive committee decided not to support the renewal of my contract. . . I knew I could get the majority of the board to support me but I didn't have confidence that the board was strong enough to displace the executive committee members, so I said, 'we're going to leave, we're going to step aside.'

In addition, two participants reported that the board had not conducted a presidential evaluation during the tenure of the derailed president. "I had asked for a presidential evaluation each year and received only informal feedback from the executive committee of the board. At

one point the board said they were planning a 360 degree evaluation of me and I was grateful . . . but it never occurred,” stated the derailed president. “The board never really understood the role of evaluation for the president. I think they do now,” stated another participant.

Derailment Theme 4. Failure of the governing board to act ethically. A second contextual theme, the lack of ethical behavior on behalf of the governing board, concerned board member conflicts of interests and the lack of a formal process for awarding vendor contracts. The derailed president recalled with a great deal of angst his concerns regarding conflicts of interest on the board when he stated,

The board chair. . .served as legal counsel for the College. So there was a conflict of interest there when he would call and we would talk about an issue or I would call him to talk about an issue. I was never clear about whether I was talking the board chair or whether I was talking to the legal counsel. Was he giving me advice that I could not follow as my counsel or was he telling me as board chair what I was supposed to do?

In addition, stated another participant, “the investment committee of the board was made up of four persons, all of whom managed funds for the College.”

With astonishment, another participant pointed to the lack of following a formalized bidding process. His eyes grew wide and his voice grew louder as he spoke the following words, “They were not competitive bidding contracts with vendors! The contracts were going to friends of friends and most of the friends were connected to the board chair!”

Two participants reported that the derailed president attempted, albeit in quiet ways, to address these conflicts of interest and vendor contracting processes. “The (derailed) president took board members to AGB (Association of Governing Board Members) meetings and the board chair attended the AGB workshops for presidents and board chairs in an attempt to get some more ethical processes in place.” In addition, “He (derailed president) said some things

about the conflicts of interest. But you have a long-time board member who likes to throw his weight around and he doesn't want to give it up. So, he (board member) starts sowing seeds of doubt about the leadership of the president.”

Summary of Presidential Derailment Themes for College I

The derailment factors for College I are categorized into four separate themes. First, there was a failure to meet institutional objectives. Especially with respect to enrollment and fundraising goals, the theme emerged that the president was unable to continue the strong growth and momentum that College I enjoyed under the former president. Second, the derailed president was unable to lead key constituencies. Regardless of constituency, there was a theme that emerged which spoke to the inability or unease of the derailed president to form the key relationships needed with individuals of affluence and/or influence which could assist the College in meeting its strategic goals. Third, there was a contextual theme that emerged from the data which focused on the diminished functionality of the governing board. There were communication issues, a power imbalance on the board, and an unwillingness to perform a key board responsibility, the presidential evaluation. Finally, a second contextual theme emerged that focused on the failure of the board to act ethically. Once the derailed president began to address the conflicts of interest and vendor selection processes, key members of the board began to express doubt about the ability of the president to lead.

Events Related to the Presidential Derailment for College I

While participants reported no watershed events related to the derailed president's departure, there was one occurrence mentioned by three participants which highlighted the final derailment theme more fully. Specifically, there were two connected instances, spanning two

years, which spoke to the ethical behavior of members of the board. In the first instance, the board was making a hiring decision on a vendor for a particular institutional planning service. The vendor in question had been introduced to the institution by the derailed president and had brought a consulting vendor into the project. After the vendor's presentation to the board, which included the consulting vendor, members of the governing board asked about the prospects of bypassing the original vendor and, instead, hiring only the consulting vendor. The derailed president stated,

. . . (the consulting vendor) did a phenomenal job at the presentation. He knocked the socks off of everybody. Well. . . the board chair says, 'well, we're not going to use the main vendor, but we are going to use the consulting vendor.' And, I said, 'The main vendor brought the consulting vendor to the table, and I don't think that's ethical.' He starts yelling at me. 'It's inappropriate, it's not my call to make.' So, I said, 'ok, whatever, you're the board chair. I'll follow your lead.'

Two years later when the executive committee communicated that the contract of the derailed president would not be renewed, a participant stated, "the board chair took offense in that two years earlier, he perceived the president had called him 'unethical' during that process. He (the board chair) never let that go. It was brought up again in those final days."

College II

The College Context

College II is a regional, liberal arts college with strong pre-professional programs in business, education, and the sciences. The science program is a particular strength, with many College II graduates in the sciences going on to medical school or other related graduate programs. The institution serves approximately 1,000 undergraduate students, has a \$20 million endowment, and is church-related. It is located in a rural part of the country and is highly residential, with all first-year students required to live on campus.

Presidential Derailment Themes

For College II, study participants included the sitting president, a senior administrator who had served on the cabinet with the derailed president, a member of the governing board, and a consultant who was engaged with the institution during the time of the derailment. In addition, data were collected from media sources and interview field notes. The data revealed two themes contributing to the derailment of the president.

Derailment Theme 1. Failure to meet institutional objectives. The factors comprising this theme included the inability of the derailed president to balance the operational budget, the lack of tuition revenue gains, and the lack of fundraising revenue gains.

At the announcement of the departure of the derailed president, a local newspaper wrote that the institution faced a \$750,000 budget deficit. This deficit represented a substantial shortfall to a tuition-dependent, private institution. As a tuition-dependent institution, College II was focused squarely on increasing tuition revenue through enrollment management when they hired the derailed president. The derailed president had a history of increasing enrollments at two other private, higher education institutions. However, at College II, the data suggested that while enrollment numbers increased, the institution was losing total tuition revenue per student and continued to experience substantial operating budget problems. This occurred because the tuition discount rate was increased, in part, to gain the increases in enrollments. As one participant stated,

We had this enrollment goal that we thought would be good, the physical plant of the campus could hold more students. I can't tell you how many times I said, 'I want somebody to convince me that each additional student adds revenue to the bottom line.' He (derailed president) would assure us yes, 'yeah, yeah, yeah, it does.' And I'm saying, 'great, we're at 1000 students and we're losing money. Who's going to explain that to me?' So he missed that. He was purely driven on enrollment numbers. . . not the total revenue picture.

As another participant noted, “He did grow enrollment, but he only cared about that incoming class number, just the bodies. Retention was terrible and we were discounting far too much.”

Yet another participant connected the operating budget problems to salary increases from new hires when she stated,

. . . he was pushing for a larger enrollment. We achieved that, we did get a larger enrollment. The discount rate went up along with that but that's not unusual. Unfortunately, he didn't necessarily plan the growth of the institution at the same pace that he planned the enrollment growth. So we tended to make new hires before we had the consistent revenue stream to support that. I think that was the downfall of it.

The local newspaper concurred, stating that the derailed president raised salaries of some faculty members and that they planned to pay for the salaries by increasing donations to the College. As one board member was reported to have stated in the article, “Sometimes it worked out, and sometimes it didn’t.”

Still another participant said, “He basically ran the place into the ground financially. He didn’t have a fundraising background, so they made no progress there, and he brought admissions people in with him that just weren’t that strong.” In fact, with respect to bringing in more revenue by way of fundraising another participant noted,

. . . he never left the office. He never, I don't think he even engaged in it (fundraising). He hired two people from out of the area . . . and basically, contracted with them to do the fundraising. So he kind of left that part of the branch of the college unattended for two years.

Derailement Theme 2. Problems with interpersonal relationships. The factors associated with this theme included a dictatorial management style, a harsh, unforgiving demeanor, a quick temper, and a cliquish, secretive approach to sharing information. This theme emerged from

interviews with each of the participants. From analyses of field notes, there emerged support that each of the participants felt especially strong about this theme. Not only was it the first factor associated with the derailment mentioned by two of the three participants, there was a good deal of participant energy devoted to expressing the depth of the interpersonal relationship problems perceived to be associated with the derailed president. As one participant stated, “He was very autocratic, almost mean spirited. Very authoritarian in style.” Stated another participant,

. . . a component to his (management) style was that he was cliquish in his administrative team. You knew very quickly if you were inside or not. He was unforgiving if you weren't on his side. So he had a brusque, mandate-oriented governing style that he showed to me on occasion. . .

Stated another participant, “he had a hot temper. He was very vindictive, very smart, an intellectual, but his temper just got in the way of everything.”

A component of the derailed president's interpersonal relationship problems emerged in the form of a perception of his being too secretive with important information needed to operate the institution. Specifically, one participant recalled his “sugar-coating” reports or “withholding reports and information from the board, faculty, and his cabinet.” As one participant stated,

There was one situation with an accreditation report in which the institution was given a year to make progress on some key financial issues and he did not tell anyone on the board about it for 4 months. That didn't sit well with people.

One participant suggested that the secrecy and lack communication was a self-preservation tactic when she stated,

Yes, the secrecy went all the way through the school. Vice presidents couldn't communicate with the board. The president wasn't communicating with the vice presidents. The vice presidents when they did communicate with him were ignored or even worse. . . He told some of his vice presidents not to share any information with their subordinates or anyone else. So he really clamped down

on things. But he was doing this because he wanted to control everything and buy time to figure out how to survive.

Summary of Presidential Derailment Themes for College II

The derailment factors for College II were captured in two separate themes. First, there was a failure to meet institutional objectives. Especially with respect to tuition revenue goals, the theme emerged that the president was able to grow enrollment numbers but was unable to sustain an operational budget based on that revenue. In addition, he was unable to successfully implement an effective fundraising program. Second, the derailed president evidenced severe problems with interpersonal relationships. A quick temper, a dominating management style, and secrecy with respect to important institutional data were all components of this theme.

Events Related to the Presidential Derailment at College II

From the interview data, there emerged a series of events related to the derailment of the president. First, there were letters hand-delivered to members of the governing board which outlined concerns on the part of members of the faculty and of the middle management at the institution. As one participant noted,

Lack of faculty confidence was the big brick to come out of the foundation for him. Anonymous letters, which were irritating but we did find out who wrote them and it was a pretty good collection of well respected tenured faculty that couldn't stand the guy and we're going, what's the deal? . . . It was the confidence, his style, and the ability to lead the school.

Next, the institution's middle management secretly contacted the board through a written communiqué and expressed its concerns. One participant stated,

. . . this letter got into the hands of one of the board members. He brought it up when it was asked if there was any new business. He said, 'yes I have new business. I have a letter with twenty signatures from middle management expressing concern about the institution's well being.' They closed that meeting down, kicked us all out and then asked us to come back later to talk about it.

In addition, the faculty met the next week and, as reported in the local newspaper, considered, but did not act upon, a vote of no-confidence. It was reported that the vote did not occur because some faculty members did not have enough information to make an informed vote. Within two weeks of the letter from middle management employees reaching the governing board, and a week from the faculty meeting where a vote of no-confidence was discussed but not acted upon, it was announced that the president would resign, effective immediately.

College III

The College Context

College III is a private, regional, liberal arts college with approximately 3,000 students. With over 50% of the student body participating in study abroad during some point of their four year program, the academic reputation of College III is rooted in its commitment to global education. College III is a church-related institution, with a strong music program, boasting almost 20 touring music ensembles. College III has an endowment of just under \$100 million, and a student to faculty ratio of 15:1. With over 75% of students choosing to live on its single campus, the institution is highly residential.

Presidential Derailment Themes

For College III, study participants included the derailed president, a senior administrator who had served on the cabinet with the derailed president, a consultant who was engaged with the institution during the time of the derailment, an executive coach who was hired by the board to assess the president, and the spouse of the derailed president, who also was employed by

College III at the time. In addition, data were collected from media sources, interview field notes, and the personal journal of the derailed president's spouse.

It is worth noting that the personal journal is more than simply a hand-written collection of thoughts and feelings expressed by the spouse of a perceived wrongly-treated president. Instead, it is a type-written, formalized, well-sourced "story," depicting events and capturing thoughts and feelings that occurred from the derailed spouse's perspective. Indeed, in the prologue of the story she writes, "The story is written from several sources: events that took place that are seared in my memory, a timeline that I recorded, a journal of conversations with people involved, and from letters and emails from friends."

The data revealed two themes contributing to the derailment of the president.

Derailement Theme 1. Inability to lead key constituencies. As in the case of College I, the primary factor associated with this theme was the inability of the president to form strategic relationships. Two of the five participants listed factors specifically pointing to this theme. All five participants discussed attributes that emerged to create this theme, but the derailed president and his spouse clearly believed he was doing everything in his power to appropriately and effectively lead key constituencies. Excerpts from the interviews highlight this difference in perceptions. The derailed president stated,

When I was hired, I was told by the board that they wanted a new direction for the institution. The institution wasn't broken, it didn't need to be fixed in any major way. But they wanted to take the institution to a new level of excellence. They wanted change, they said, but they really didn't want change. I enacted change. And I didn't know that there were problems until I got the phone call from the board chair asking for my resignation.

However, another participant stated, ". . . he (derailed president) really was blindsided. There were some people that were complaining about his leadership, but he didn't have the

relationships built strongly enough with the right people to survive.” A factor contributing to his inability to lead key constituents stemmed from the fact that the derailed president was hired immediately following the tenure of a very successful and long-standing, well-loved president. The former president and his wife not only stayed in the community where the institution was located, they also attended campus and alumni events around the country. Indeed, a participant shared,

I recall them (the former president and his wife) traveling around the country to alumni events and I remember a memorial service for a staff member where the former president stood and spoke with the family after the service while the derailed president waited. Eventually, he (the derailed president) needed to get to another event, so he never was able to speak with the family that day. It’s not easy to be the president in that situation.

Another participant shared with a measure of incredulity,

The former president had been president for almost 25 years. He began his career as a student at the school and taught there for many years prior to being president. He had done a wonderful job and he (derailed president) recognized him on numerous occasions, thanking him for his service. The mandate from the board for him (derailed president) was to create a new vision for the school. The former president continued to attend college events, even in other parts of the country and heard and felt the excitement of “change.” How would that feel to the one who created everything that was being changed? Do CEOs of companies after they retire return to events many times a year to hear the new CEO speak about the future?

Because the previous president stayed heavily and visibly involved in the life of the institution, participants suggested that the derailed president, who was new to the community, did not fully have the opportunity to lead and build the strategic relationships needed, especially with board members, to weather difficult times. In addition, a perception emerged from the data that the derailed president failed to effectively lead even those on his administrative team. Specifically, the perception emerged that members of the administrative team were not as

supportive of him privately as they might have acted publicly. For instance, one participant stated,

I was convinced that (one of his trusted assistants) was not backing him privately. There were things being said that were inappropriate and painted him and a bad light. I think this assistant was still devoted to the previous president and did not buy into the changes he (derailed president) was instituting.

Added another participant,

The third year in the presidency, in the summer, he took a month off. The school was not used to that. The former president never did anything like that. They had spent the last year putting together a comprehensive strategic plan, with hundreds of participants, it was great. But it was not finished. And it needed to be done three weeks after he was to return from vacation. His assistant called me to say that she was concerned about his lack of direction.

There also was a key member of the president's cabinet who chose not to continue working at the institution once her position description was rewritten. While the changed position description included more responsibility and visibility with various constituencies and was rewritten by the president with input from the chair of the board, the cabinet member decided to leave the institution instead of taking the new role. The data suggested this cabinet member was not supportive of the new direction the derailed president was taking the institution. Stated one participant,

There were problems with (this cabinet member). She had been rewarded for years for her loyalty to the previous president, not for her production on the job. Most understood that the institution wasn't getting what it needed out of that position and it was critical that the president have the right team behind him.

Another participant concurred, stating,

When he (derailed president) reworked that position, it was clear she was not going to take it and he was in a sense writing her out of the position. She began to complain to board members and others in the community and it wasn't good.

Regardless of whether it was a key assistant, a cabinet member, or board member, the derailed president was unable to lead the key constituencies he needed to succeed. While some participants pointed to the fact that the former president stayed inappropriately and heavily involved in the activities of the institution, the derailed president was unable to either view this as a concern or if it was perceived as a concern, to build the strategic relationships necessary to buffer himself from the debilitating criticism.

Derailment Theme 2. Diminished governing board functionality. The factors associated with this theme included the lack of adherence to board adopted policies and procedures, especially as it related to the evaluation of the president, and a power imbalance within the structure of the board. Because of their fiduciary and legal responsibilities to the institution, governing boards have the responsibility to create and implement a variety of policies and procedures to assure that individuals and/or factions within the board do not usurp the rightful authority of the corporate body. In the instance of College III, the data suggests that the board had good policies and procedures with respect to how it should relate to and communicate with the president and administration. However, the data also suggests that those policies and procedures were not followed. Stated one participant,

He (derailed president) was evaluated every year except the final year. He received all A minus grades on his evaluations. But, apparently, those evaluations didn't mean anything. . . the chair of the board affairs committee oversaw the evaluation process and he was the one given responsibility by the board to develop a very detailed process of evaluation. As the chair, he also had the responsibility to see that this process was followed. He was the one individual who could have and should have 'stopped the train,' by insisting on following the process (by evaluating the derailed president in the final year).

Another participant noted,

The former president and another board member manipulated the board chair. They decided that the ‘change’ occurring at the institution was not good and they worked behind the scenes to make a change with the president.

This rogue activity was supported by other participants. Stated one,

He (derailed president) was clearly the best candidate for the job. And, at first, things seemed to be going smoothly. But, in the shadows, there were people on campus and in the community who had clout and they began complaining about the direction he was taking the institution.

While such Machiavellian suggestions may seem a bit implausible, it is important to note that the local newspaper reported that the former president agreed to serve the institution as interim president immediately following the resignation of the derailed president. In addition, one participant shared, “. . . and on day three of his interim presidency, he hired back the cabinet member who had left because the position had been rewritten.”

The data does support, then, the notion that the board had in place well-thought-out policies and procedures with respect to presidential evaluations. They even conducted the evaluations for every year of the derailed president’s tenure save the final year. However, when the resignation was asked for, there was no discernible process that was followed. Indeed, one participant stated,

Most on the board were stunned. They thought things were going well. They met for five hours, debating whether or not to accept his resignation. In the end, no one would stand up for following a process. But two board members did stand up and resign from the board in the middle of that meeting. It was just weakness on the part of the board.

Additionally, the media accounts of the derailment support the lack of communications from the board to the president. When asked about his plans for the future, the derailed president was quoted as saying simply, “we will take some time this summer to be together as a family and

reflect upon our next endeavor, of which there are many to consider.” Such a response does not suggest that the derailed president had time to previously consider and prepare for his future.

Similarly, the wife of the derailed president created the following emotional entry into her personal journal, entitled, “God is Faithful,”

Part of the trauma and grieving of our situation has been the loneliness of experiencing something that no else we have ever known personally, has gone through. One thinks of something like this happening to a CEO in a large corporation, not in a small, private, church-related college. We just couldn’t understand how this was happening because we had heard of no significant problems until “the call” on that Easter weekend.

There is evidence, then, that the board did not act effectively or communicate well with the derailed president with respect to their decisions or actions.

Summary of Presidential Derailment Themes at College III

The derailment factors for College III are categorized into two separate themes. First, there was an inability to lead key constituencies. Whether the former president’s presence played a role or not, the data suggests that the derailed president was unable to form the strategic relationships with key individuals on the board and on his staff. Especially following a longstanding and successful president, an Achilles Heel for the derailed president was not possessing strong relationships upon which to lean when the murmuring began. Second, there was diminished governing board functionality. This contextual theme was apparent through the board’s lack of following established policy and procedure in utilizing the presidential evaluation. Also, there was a lack of clarity in the board’s expectations of the derailed president, and a lack of communication between the board and the derailed president throughout the process. In fact, many on the governing board were stunned when confronted with the resignation letter from the derailed president. This, after the board chair approached the derailed

president and asked for his resignation. Only a few on the board knew of this action. Stated one participant, “I have asked others at schools associated with our church if they’ve heard of anything like this kind of board activity before and the answer has been a definitive, ‘no’.”

Events Related to the Presidential Derailment for College III

While participants reported no breakpoint moments related to the derailed president departure, there was one occurrence mentioned by three participants which was reported in the second derailment theme. Specifically, the rewriting of the cabinet member’s job description which lead to her resignation was a key event related to the derailment. Said one participant, “. . . there were concerns before that, but after she resigned, it became much more noticeable. It became louder and harder for the board chair to ignore.”

College IV

The College Context

College IV is a private, nationally-recognized, liberal arts college with approximately 3,000 students. It has a national reputation as a rigorous academic institution with programs of excellence in science and music. Over 75% of graduating seniors participate in study abroad programs. College IV is strongly related to the church, possesses an endowment of over \$300 million, and a student to faculty ratio of 12:1. The average ACT score for incoming students is almost 30. The institution is regularly ranked in various reports as one of the finest private, liberal arts institutions in the country.

Presidential Derailment Themes

For College IV, study participants included the derailed president, a senior administrator who had served on the cabinet with the derailed president, a consultant who was engaged with the institution during the time of the derailment, and an executive coach who was hired by the board to improve the derailed president's abilities and capacities. In addition, data were collected from media sources and interview field notes. The data revealed two themes contributing to the derailment of the president.

Derailment Theme 1. Problems with interpersonal relationships. The primary factor associated with this theme was the inability of the derailed president to control his temper. The derailed president at College IV represents himself as an affable and charismatic figure. Indeed, one participant reported that an important strength of his was to be able to "make others feel good about being on the team and serving the institution." However, emerging from the data was a perception of the derailed president also as having a quick temper and sharp tongue. Unfortunately, this perception of him was characterized as being displayed rather regularly. Stated one participant,

He was fun to be with and good to work with as well. But there were times when his temper would just blow up. He would blow and then things would be weird for a few weeks. These weren't small explosions, these were huge eruptions of emotion. It was odd to see the transformation.

Another participant reported the display of anger as almost a change of personality when he stated,

He was a fantastic guy but he had a temper that would exhibit itself in strange, unexpected occasions. It came out on a few occasions with board members and others in the community and it was kind of a scary transformation because generally he is such a wonderfully friendly and outgoing and warm guy. It didn't happen very often but, you know, maybe once every couple months something would spark it and it was an unusual manifestation because you were so used to

seeing another kind of person and then you would see this very angry person for about, this person would only last a couple, three or four minutes and then he would sort of apologize. It didn't sit well with people if you happened to be at the brunt of that.

As another participant stated, there was no way for the derailed president to recover from some of the outbursts.

He simply would lose his cool and allow himself to let anger take over. And he did it in front of board members and it was just too much for him to overcome. You know, one or two times, people can push that aside. People have bad days. But when it becomes a pattern over every few months or whatever, that's when people start asking if this is the right leader for the institution.

The derailed president recognized his problem stating,

I gave in to my temper a few times, one in particular with a board member. And, after that I worked with a personal coach and that was really helpful. I know in retrospect, I didn't handle things well and I own that.

Derailement Theme 2. Inability to adapt. The factors associated with this theme included the inability of the president to navigate the various cultures of a higher education community with sensitivity. Instead, it was reported that he simply would "speak his mind and let the chips fall where they may."

The higher education enterprise is diverse and varied. Even at the institutional level, there are multiple constituencies that need to be supported, heard, and served in order for a president to be successful. In the instance of College IV, the data suggested that the derailed president was unable to adapt to the various cultural demands of the institution. In particular, the data suggested that he was appreciated by faculty and students for his progressive political views and stances and simultaneously was unable to convince other more conservative constituents that he was taking the institution in the right direction.

As an example, one participant stated,

The faculty liked him a good bit. And that's not easy here. But they liked the fact that he was willing to take stands on issues and that he was typically in agreement with their worldview. I mean, whether it was medical rights for homosexual partners or the war in Iraq, he was vocal and most of the faculty agreed with him so it was no problem there.

Stated another participant,

He (derailed president) is opinionated. Not necessarily in a bad way, but he will say what he thinks. And for some, that was difficult because he was saying things we weren't used to hearing here.

Another participant stated, “. . . the students and faculty were fine with (derailed president). It was the broader community and some members of the board where the issues were.” The derailed president recognized this problem when he stated with a good bit of emotion,

I was aggressive for pressing for more diversity on campus. There is nothing wrong with our present students -- white, and of our denomination -- but that group is diminishing. Just practically speaking, we were going to need different students. Even from the regional kids -- we needed different students. I am more progressive on race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and it was popular on campus, but not popular with the board or parts of the community. They wanted the school to be the same school that they remembered, white, upper middle class, and heterosexual.

However, the president did not view this as an inability of his to adapt. Instead, he viewed it as a clash of worldviews. He stated,

To me it's clear that I was let go because we had a difference in philosophies about life. I was more progressive and the board was not ready for that. I'm not sure there is much that could have been done. We talked about the need for student diversity in my interview, but I don't believe, in retrospect, that they really wanted that.

Summary of Presidential Derailment Themes for College IV

The derailment factors for College IV are categorized into two separate themes. First, there were problems with interpersonal relationships. The concerns over the derailed president's anger made many on the board and in the community question his ability to lead the institution. Second, there was the inability to adapt to the various cultures at the institution. Specifically, the derailed president was unable to easily navigate the cultures of various constituencies at College IV. He had no ability to massage and communicate his personal world view in ways that would be helpful for his presidency and the institution. Instead, he adopted a posture of being blunt about his positions and philosophies and letting "the chips fall where they may."

Events Related to the Presidential Derailment at College IV

The data revealed two specific events that were closely related to the derailment. First, participants reported the placement of a political sign on the lawn of the president's home was viewed by many in the community and members of the board as positioning College IV in an inappropriately political way. Stated one participant, "I know the sign thing hurt him. People were really upset by that. The college owned the home and there was a sense from some on the board that this was way over the line."

The derailed president agreed,

There were a group of students who were distributing the signs and I put one of those in front of my house. And that probably wasn't smart. Some said, 'this isn't the president's house and he doesn't have the right to place that sign there.' And I think in retrospect they are right. Once (the political issue was resolved), I took the sign down. And I talked to the campus the next day and said that we needed to support the president (of the United States) now. But regardless of that response, some saw me as too liberal.

The second event related to the derailment was a specific outbreak of anger during a board meeting. The derailed president recalled the event,

I think the board meeting where I got angry was a big event. I think if I hadn't gotten angry, I would still be there. . . At a board meeting, at the October board meeting, I gave the update on (a project). One of the board members, one of the weak board members – didn't come a lot, not very engaged, but she was a local celebrity of sorts. She said, 'Your decision (on the project) has caused me grief, I can't go to the country club anymore without hearing about it from my friends.' And I said, 'well, I did as the board directed me to do, and we now have the \$10 million. We could always go back and give them the money back or talk with them about it, but that is your decision as a board, not mine.' And she said, "well, your decision seems whimsical" And I said, 'No, it wasn't whimsical. And it wasn't my decision, it was yours. I've taken the full brunt of this public attack, and no one else in this room has. And I wouldn't do that on whimsy. This is a \$10 million dollar deal. You need to take responsibility for this.' I got upset and publicly chastised her. My angry response was not appropriate and that was never forgotten.

After the board meeting, the board asked the president to meet with an executive coach to help him deal more compassionately and effectively with people. The president agreed and the board met with the executive coach as well to get updates on the president's progress. Although the executive coach reported progress, the board made the decision later that winter to ask for the president's resignation. Stated the executive coach,

The board didn't know what they wanted at the time I met with them. I left a meeting with the board and it was clear to me that they weren't in agreement as to what they wanted from this president. But, it was also clear that he couldn't survive.

Summary of Themes Related to Presidential Derailments

In total, there were six discrete themes which emerged from the data across the four College settings. Those themes were: failure to meet institutional objectives, inability to lead key constituencies, diminished governing board functionality, failure of the governing board to act ethically, problems with interpersonal relationships, and an inability to adapt. These six

themes are summarized below and the frequency with which they appear in the four college settings is identified.

Derailment Theme 1. Failure to meet institutional objectives

This theme represented the inability of the derailed president to meet institutional expectations or goals, either annual or strategic. Typically these goals were in the areas of finance, enrollment, budgeting, and fundraising. In one case, there was clear agreement that institutional financial, enrollment, budgeting, and/or fundraising goals were not being met. However, in another case, the derailed president expressed a lack of understanding that institutional goals were not being achieved. This theme was observed in two of the four college settings.

Derailment Theme 2. Inability to lead key constituents

This theme represented the inability of the derailed president to form strategic relationships. A strategic relationship was defined as a relationship with individuals of influence and/or affluence who could provide the counsel, friendship, support, or other assistance that could help the president and the institution succeed and also could serve to buffer the president from an ad hominem criticism. This theme involved the inability to form strategic relationships with board members and key staff. This theme was observed in two out of the four cases.

Derailment Theme 3. Problems with interpersonal relationships

This theme represented the inability of the derailed president to manage his interpersonal relationships adequately. Specifically, factors associated with this theme included an inability to control anger, a dictatorial management style, a harsh, unforgiving demeanor, and a cliquish, secretive approach to sharing information. This theme emerged in two of the four cases.

Derailment Theme 4. Inability to adapt

This theme represented the inability of the derailed president to operate in the multiple cultures which are embedded in the higher education setting. The factor associated with this theme included the inability to express his personal or political views to a wide range of constituencies in ways that could be helpful both to the presidency and to the institution. Specifically, the derailed president was able to articulate his positions and attitudes on sensitive topics only in a blunt fashion and failed to inform his communication approach with any other data save his own voice of conscience. This theme emerged in one of the four cases.

Derailment Theme 5. Diminished governing board functionality

This theme was contextual for the derailed president in that it was not a flaw of his making or doing. Instead, it was part of the context of the institution that he was operating within. Factors associated with this theme included lack of clarity of institutional direction on the part of the board, lack of communication within the board and with the president, and a failure to implement policies and procedures for board work with the president, especially with respect to the presidential evaluation process. This theme emerged in two of the four cases.

Derailment Theme 6. Failure of the governing board to act ethically

This theme also was contextual in nature. Factors associated with this theme included open conflicts of interest among the members of the board and providing “sweetheart” deals to vendors close to individual board members. This theme emerged in one of the four cases.

To analyze the themes across the four College settings, the researcher first listed each of the themes presented in each College setting. Next, a comparison was completed across each of the settings. Table 4-2 displays the results of this analysis.

Table 4-2: Cross College Theme Analysis

	<i>Theme</i>	<i>College I</i>	<i>College II</i>	<i>College III</i>	<i>College IV</i>
Individual Themes	Failure to meet institutional objectives	yes	yes		
	Inability to lead key constituencies	yes		yes	
	Problems with interpersonal relationships		yes		yes
	Inability to adapt				yes
Contextual Themes	Diminished governing board functionality	yes		yes	
	Failure of the governing board to act ethically	yes			

Summary of Events Related to Presidential Derailments

The data presented six events that were related to the derailments of the study presidents. Those events were: a perceived charge of unethical behavior on the part of the president toward a board member; letters written by management and faculty expressing no-confidence in the president and delivered to board members; faculty consideration of a no-confidence vote which was reported in the local media; rewriting a cabinet position description which precipitated a resignation of a cabinet officer; the placing of a political sign in front of the president's home (which was owned by the college); and, an angry outburst toward a board member during a board meeting. While there were no similarities across the college settings with respect to these specific events, it is clear that events or actions have powerful meanings and, in these instances, hastened the derailment of a president.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership within the higher education enterprise is important in the building and sustaining of institutional success. When higher education leaders perform well, the institutions they serve experience enhanced opportunity to fulfill fully their institutional mission and vision. When, on the other hand, leaders derail, the institutions those leaders were serving are paused in their momentum and added financial and emotional costs are experienced. Gaining insights into the relationship between higher education presidential derailment and institutional success was the initial impetus for this study. Ultimately, it was determined that a study focused on the factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailment would both extend the executive derailment literature and would provide utility to higher education leaders.

The purpose of the study was to describe those factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailments at selected private, liberal arts higher education institutions. The research questions which guided the study were:

1. What factors are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?
2. What events are perceived to be associated with the derailment of the private higher education president?

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings in relation to the conceptual framework as presented in Chapter II, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. Using a conceptual framework adapted from Leslie and Van Velsor (1996), 17 in-depth interviews, field notes, media accounts, and a personal journal identified six presidential derailment themes within the selected four cases.

Factors Perceived To Be Associated With Presidential Derailment

Six derailment themes were observed in the four cases presented. Derailment themes one through four were considered to be individually-related to the behaviors, skills, and abilities of the derailed president. These were themes which highlighted areas in which a derailed president could improve upon, change, or otherwise impact directly. The final two derailment themes were contextual to the derailed president. Factors making up these themes were ones in which the derailed president had much less ability to improve upon, change, or otherwise impact directly. Both of the contextual themes related to the governing board.

Derailment Theme 1. Failure to meet institutional objectives. This theme represented the inability of the derailed president to meet institutional expectations or goals, either annual or strategic. Typically these goals were in the areas of finance, enrollment, budgeting, and fundraising. In one case, there was clear agreement that institutional financial, enrollment, budgeting, and/or fundraising goals were not being met. However, in another case, the derailed president expressed a lack of understanding that institutional goals were not being achieved. This theme was observed in two of the four college settings.

Derailment Theme 2. Inability to lead key constituents. The primary factor associated with this theme was the inability of the president to form strategic relationships. Strategic relationships were defined as relationships with those individuals of influence and/or affluence who could provide the counsel, friendship, support, or other assistance that could help the president and the institution succeed and also could serve to buffer the president from ad hominem criticisms. This theme involved the inability to form strategic relationships with board members and key staff. This theme was observed in two out of the four cases.

Derailment Theme 3. Problems with interpersonal relationships. This theme represented the inability of the derailed president to manage his interpersonal relationships adequately. Specifically, factors associated with this theme included an inability to control anger, a dictatorial management style, a harsh, unforgiving demeanor, and a cliquish, secretive approach to sharing information. This theme emerged in two of the four cases

Derailment Theme 4. Inability to adapt. The theme represented the inability of the derailed president to operate in the multiple cultures which are embedded in the higher education setting. The primary factor associated with this theme included the inability to express his personal or political views in ways that could be helpful both to the presidency and to the institution across a multitude of constituencies. Specifically, the derailed president was able to articulate his positions and attitudes on sensitive topics only in a blunt fashion and failed to inform his communication approach with any other data save his own voice of conscience. This lack of adaptation emerged in one of the four cases.

Derailment Theme 5. Diminished governing board functionality. This theme was contextual for the derailed president in that it was not a flaw of his making or doing. Instead, it was part of the context of the institution within which he was operating. Factors associated with this theme included lack of clarity of institutional direction on the part of the board, lack of communication within the board and with the president, and lack of implementing policies and procedures for board work with the president, especially with respect to the process of presidential evaluation. This theme emerged in two of the four cases.

Derailment Theme 6. Failure of the governing board to act ethically. This theme also was contextual in nature. Factors associated with this theme included open conflicts of interest among the members of the board and providing “sweetheart” deals to vendors with close

personal relationships to individual board members. This theme emerged in one of the four cases.

Summary of Events Related to Presidential Derailments

The data presented six events that were related to the derailments of the study presidents. Those events were: a perceived charge of unethical behavior on the part of the president toward a board member; letters written by management and faculty expressing no-confidence in the president and delivered to board members; faculty consideration of a no-confidence vote which was reported in the local media; rewriting a cabinet position description which precipitated a resignation of a cabinet officer; the placing of a political sign in front of the president's home (which was owned by the college); and, an angry outburst toward a board member during a board meeting.

While there were not similarities evidenced in the specifics of these events, there was agreement in the cases under study that events hastened the derailment of the president. Events or actions are the most tangible of ways in which attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts are expressed. The expressions, then, created perceptions among others regarding the appropriateness of the derailed president's leadership. Those perceptions, in turn, helped lead to the derailment action.

Presidential Derailment Themes and the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework established for the study was adapted from the for-profit business research on executive derailment. Specifically, the work of Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) was adapted and added to. The five factors proposed as being related to presidential derailments were:

1. Failure to Meet Institutional Objectives;

2. Inability to Lead Key Constituents;
3. Problems with Interpersonal Relationships;
4. Inability to Change or Adapt; and,
5. Failure of the President to Act Ethically.

Support for themes one through four were evidenced in the data. Theme five, the failure the president to act ethically was not found. In addition, two contextual factors, diminished governing board functionality and failure on the part of the governing board to act ethically emerged. Comparisons to the conceptual framework are provided.

Derailment Theme 1. Failure to meet institutional objectives

Within the executive derailment research, this theme has evidenced such factors as lack of follow through (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988), performance problems (Morrison, et. al, 1987; Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996; McCall & Lombardo, 1983), and betrayal of trust (McCall & Lombardo, 1983). In the present study, derailed presidents exhibiting these issues were not meeting financial, budgetary, enrollment, and/or fundraising goals of the institution.

Derailment Theme 2. Inability to lead key constituents

The executive derailment literature within the for-profit business context has found that executives exhibiting this problem cannot manage subordinates (Morrison, et. al., 1987), have difficulty in molding a staff (McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Lombardo & McCauley, 1988), are unable to build and lead a team (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996), and are perceived as not tough enough (Hollenbeck & McCall, 2001). In the present study, derailed presidents exhibiting this theme showcased an inability to form strategic relationships with individuals of influence and/or

affluence who could provide counsel, assist the institution and the president, and buffer the president from criticism.

Derailment Theme 3. Problems with interpersonal relationships

A major theme within the for-profit business research on executive derailment, problems with interpersonal relationships has represented insensitivity and arrogance (McCall & Lombardo, 1983), too ambitious (Morrison, et. al., 1987), authoritarian (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996), and ruthlessness (Hollenbeck & McCall, 2001). In the present study, derailed presidents exhibiting these issues were authoritarian, angry, secretive, and self-preserving.

Derailment Theme 4. Inability to adapt

In the for-profit business literature on executive derailment, factors associated with this theme included an inability to adapt to a boss with a different style (McCall & Lombardo, 1983), an inability to adapt to a boss or culture (Morrison, et. al., 1987), strategic differences with management (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988), conflict with upper management (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996) and haphazard repatriation (Hollenbeck & McCall, 2001). In the present study, an inability to adapt was evidenced in the inability of the derailed president to articulate his positions on sensitive issues in a way other than a blunt, controversial manner. Instead of using the opportunities to thoughtfully express his thinking on sensitive issues, he would simply express himself and “let the chips fall where they may.”

Derailment Theme 5. Failure of the president to act ethically

Perhaps surprisingly, given the recent coverage in national media regarding the ethical lapses of business leaders, this factor has not been reported as being evidenced in the for-profit business executive derailment literature. However, both Bogue (1994) and Calabrese and

Roberts (2001) suggested that ethical lapses on the part of the president in higher education may be an important factor in understanding derailment. The present study did not support this suggestion.

However, ethical lapses were factors in the presidential derailment in one case. The ethical lapses, though, were evidenced on the part of the governing board, not with the derailed president. These lapses were evidenced primarily as numerous conflicts of interests among the board members and awarding vendor contracts on behalf of the institution via personal relationships with board members, bypassing any formalized, competitive process.

The conflicts of interest that were noted in the study included having members of the board investment committee also serving as the money managers for the investment funds. In addition, the chair of the board served the institution as legal counsel. The vendor contracts were not being awarded through a competitive, formalized process and instead, were being awarded based on relationships with board members, primarily relationships with the board chair. The derailed president made attempts to rectify these situations through training by attending Association of Governing Board conferences with board members and by working behind the scenes to create new, formalized processes. Ultimately, a few board members who proved unwilling to change the pattern of unethical activities began to suggest privately that the president's leadership was lacking. So, while there was evidence for ethical lapses having contributed to presidential derailment, it was the ethical lapses with respect to members of the board. When the president attempted to address and correct these lapses, board members began to undermine his leadership.

Upon reflecting on this finding, one may question the frequency with which unethical behavior on the part of the governing board is a factor in presidential derailments. While our

eyes and ears are sensitized to stories in the press regarding unethical behavior on the part of our higher education presidents (Bogue, 1994), we hear virtually nothing regarding unethical governing board behavior, especially in the private, higher education setting. Perhaps this realization suggests that individuals serving on governing boards are more inclined to act ethically than are individuals who serve as presidents. As one who believes human beings are more alike than dissimilar, this researcher finds such a suggestion difficult to take seriously. Perhaps, then, and since governing boards have the authority to hire and dismiss the president, unethical governing boards are simply more apt to dismiss an ethical president who attempts to make change. In this way, then, the extent of unethical governing board behavior may be shielded from public scrutiny because the governing retains the right to dismiss a president who wishes to address the behavior.

Additionally, there was a sixth derailment theme found in the present study that has not been found in the for-profit business literature on executive derailment. It is to the new derailment theme, diminished governing board functionality, that we now turn.

Derailment Theme 6. Diminished governing board functionality

This theme represented an inability of the governing board to function in effective ways with respect to the institution and the administration of the institution. Specific factors associated with this theme were a failure of the governing board to follow written policies and procedures with respect to presidential evaluations, a lack of communication among the members of the board and with the president, and a lack of clarity in providing the president with institutional goals and objectives. This contextual theme was related to derailments in that the

diminished functionality of the board did not provide the derailed president with the communications, feedback, tools, and insights in order to do his work effectively.

Figure 5-1 updates the conceptual framework presented in Chapter II and displays the factors associated with presidential derailments as evidenced in this study. The additional contextual factors of failure of the governing board to act ethically and diminished governing board functionality are noted on the right side of the figure.

Methodological Considerations

Utilizing a qualitative approach was called for given the lack of research on presidential derailment in the higher education arena. To better understand this phenomenon, it was crucial to have a rich source of data. Therefore, in-depth interviewing was the qualitative approach most

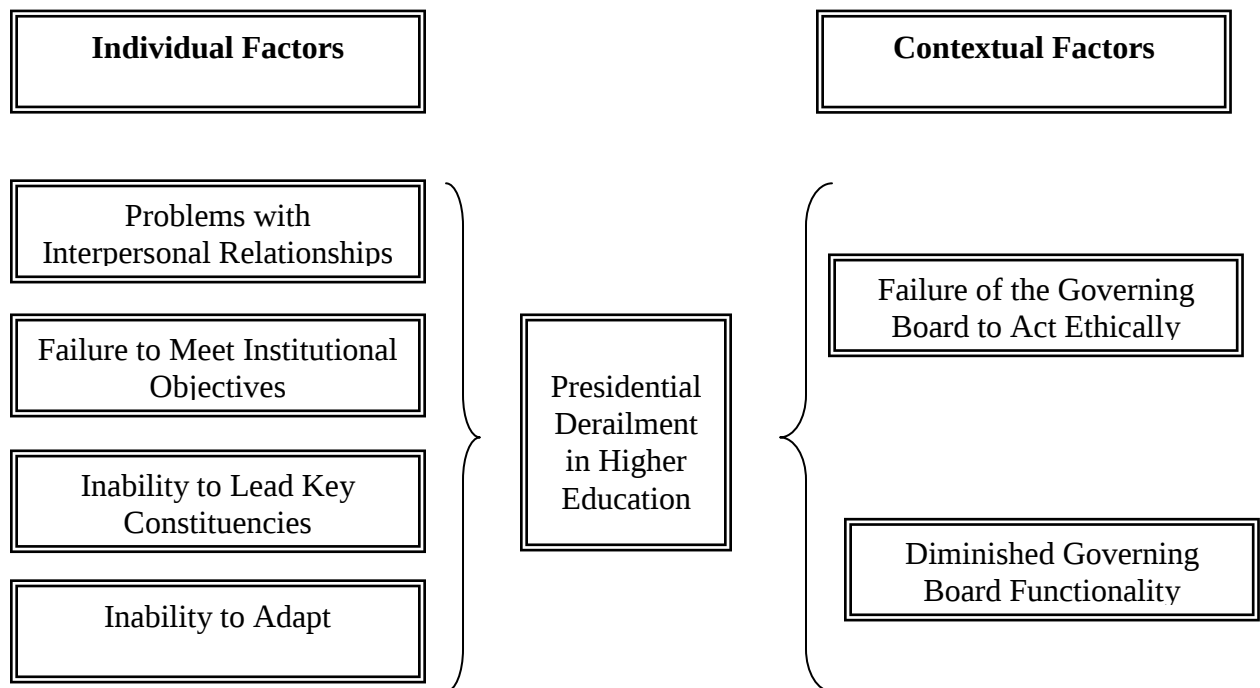


Figure 5-1: Factors Associated with Presidential Derailment

appropriate. However, questions were raised in the early stages of the study by members of the committee regarding the willingness of informed individuals to be included in a study which would address sometimes sensitive, personal, and perhaps emotionally painful subject matter.

To the researcher's frustration, there was evidence of an unwillingness to participate on the part of 13 individuals representing 10 potential study cases. In most instances, the individuals cited a legal "gag order," or a legal agreement not to discuss the specifics of the case, as the reason for non-participation. However, some individuals also cited an unwillingness to recall institutionally and personally painful events associated with the derailment. In short, these non-participants simply wanted to move past a difficult period in the institution's history and they viewed participating in a study of this nature as an unnecessary reminder of problematic times and events. In addition, in some instances, the participants of the study had to be convinced of their participation multiple times. It was clear that some participants were weary of and leery of discussing this topic, even confidentially.

Among the study participant prospects, members of governing boards were the most unwilling to participate. Unfortunately, the study included the perceptions from only one governing board member. Six governing board members were contacted with five refusing, citing the reasons provided previously.

In sharp contrast to the responses of the non-participants, one participant expressed clearly his belief in the goodness of presidential derailment research when he stated,

The problem with presidential derailment is that when it happens, the institution goes one way, and the president goes another way. No one pauses to ask what really happened here? No one stops to have discussion of any kind. In fact, in many situations you are legal bound not to discuss the situation. So, what happens is that people walk away from the situation with hurts and pains and confusions and misunderstandings. No one grows. The institution doesn't learn

as much as it could because there is no debriefing. And the derailed president doesn't learn as much as he could either. This kind of study is needed.

In addition, the primary delimiting aspect of this study was the reliance on a convenience sample of four, private higher education institutions. An aim of the study was to explore the appropriateness of applying enduring executive derailment themes found in the for-profit business literature to a non-profit, higher education setting. While four out of the five themes comprising the conceptual model were found, none of the themes were evidenced in more than two out of the four cases studies. Two of the themes – failure of the governing board to act ethically and the inability to adapt – were evidenced in only one of the four cases. Therefore, it is important to note that the findings of the present study are applicable only to the specific cases as presented. However, as the present study was designed as exploratory, the findings do strongly suggest future research to test the legitimacy of these derailment themes within and across broader higher education settings.

Conclusion

This qualitative study supported the findings of previous executive derailment research in the for-profit business literature. Specifically, the factors associated with presidential derailments in these selected private, liberal arts higher education institutions were similar to the four enduring themes of executive derailment as presented by Leslie and Van Velsor (1996). For the purposes of the present study, those themes were: problems with interpersonal relationships, failure to meet institutional objectives, inability to lead key constituencies, and the inability to adapt. Each of these themes is focused on the abilities, attitudes, and skills of the individual serving as president.

In addition, the present study found evidence of contextual derailment themes involving the governing board which were associated with presidential derailments in private, liberal arts institutions. Specifically, those themes were a failure on the part of the governing board to act ethically and diminished governing board functionality. Such contextual themes are outside of the immediate control of the president and help to create the environment within which he or she works.

Implications For Practice

That leaders make a difference in the success of their institutions should suggest that institutions and presidential candidates are exceedingly thoughtful when going about the process of a presidential search. While there are a wide variety of presidential search models utilized by institutions, each of the four cases presented utilized some form of consultative assistance during the process to hire the derailed president. Even with such thoughtful approaches, presidential derailments occurred. The findings of this study reveal opportunities, for both the institution and the presidential candidate, during the presidential search process to lessen the probability for derailment to occur.

In addition, the findings of the present study suggest opportunities for presidents early in their tenures to receive performance feedback. Specifically, early formalized and enhanced communication between the board and the president focused on performance feedback, relationship building, and recommendations for better leadership approaches would provide the president with an enhanced evaluation based on research and would strengthen the communication both among board members and also with the president.

Conducting a Board Audit. When an institution has experienced the departure of a president, for whatever reason, there is a natural opportunity to pause, reflect, and assess the operations of the governing board. In many instances, the governing board will pause to conduct an assessment in an attempt to ascertain the characteristics and skills most needed in the next president. Capretta, Clark, and Dai (2008) even suggested organizations should review the derailment literature, prioritize the derailment characteristics, and use the resulting list to inform the interview process for the next president.

However, this researcher is unaware of any widespread utilization of a governing board audit which would be designed to assess the structure, operations, leadership, and effectiveness of the board itself. Such an assessment should be conducted by an independent consultant and should include both qualitative and quantitative approaches so that a full picture of governing board effectiveness can be generated. It should be conducted confidentially so that members of the governing board, and perhaps others, can speak candidly about their views on their own participation as well as the overall assessment of the board's functioning.

The present study found two factors, failure of the board to act ethically and diminished governing board functionality, as contextual factors in presidential derailments. The relationship between the board and the president is crucial to institutional success. Effective and ethical governing board actions are needed to provide the president with the best possible opportunities to lead the institution in ways directed by the board. A governing board audit conducted prior to a presidential search would assure both members of the board as well as potential presidential candidates that the board was functioning ethically and effectively. In instances where the audit provided recommendations to strengthen the board, there also would be time available to make changes prior to the selection of a new president.

Early Formalized and Enhanced Presidential Evaluations. The study findings suggest that derailed presidents either do not receive performance evaluations in a regularized manner or that the evaluations are not utilized as opportunities to address concerns and enhance performance. The proposed recommendation is to establish a special early formalized presidential evaluation system which would occur four times during the first two years of the president's tenure. The enhanced evaluation system would include not only assessments of progress on key organizational and individual goals, but also would include specific recommendations regarding the forming of strategic relationships important to a successful presidency. In the present study, there was evidence presented suggesting that the inability to lead key constituencies was a factor in two cases of presidential derailment. Whether it was leading members of the board, members of the cabinet, or key administrative employees, problems were present when a president was unable to form the strategic relationships needed to implement his vision for the institution. In addition, when unwarranted criticisms snowballed, the lack of strategic relationships was debilitating for the derailed president as there was no one to shield or buffer the president. Therefore, special attention should be paid during early presidential evaluations to assess and make recommendations regarding the president's progress on building key relationships.

To ascertain progress on these aspects of the president's performance, the board could request from the president a list of key donors and other community members, along with other key administrative staff members. Typically, when a larger group of individuals are involved in a presidential evaluation, they are asked to provide perspective on presidential progress and effectiveness. This researcher believes such an approach is, at best, unhelpful, because many of these individuals may not have a good sense of what the president does or should do. However,

instead of asking these individuals for their perspectives on the president's progress, an enhanced evaluation system would ask about the strength of their relationship with the president. How connected, for instance, do they feel to the new president? How often has he visited with them? Questions such as these would inform the board on the president's progress toward forming strategic relationships and on the ability of the president to lead key constituencies.

Recommendations for Future Research

Higher education presidential derailments are financially costly and, potentially harmful, events both to the institution and the derailed president. The present study was an early attempt to better understand the factors related to this important phenomenon. Future research should address the shortcomings of the current work and extend our understanding of presidential derailments in higher education in the following ways. First, future research should seek to create a generalizable set of findings. Specifically, moving beyond a purely qualitative approach and testing the derailment factors found in the present study through a quantitative approach would assist in understanding the broader nature of the factors related to presidential derailments in higher education. Second, future research should expand the type of higher education institution studied. The present study focused on private, liberal arts colleges. However, there are fundamental differences between the private and public higher education enterprise with respect to governance and funding, for instance, and it is not clear if those differences would impact the factors associated with presidential derailments. Third, the present study incorporated a convenience sample of participants. This convenience sample produced an all-male presidential and an all-male derailed presidential sample. It would be of interest for future

research to investigate female presidential derailments to assess the similarities and any differences that may be present based on gender.

Finally, findings from the present study suggest that there are contextual themes associated with presidential derailments at private, liberal arts higher education institutions. These findings are distinctly new to the derailment research, which, in the past has uncovered only individual characteristics associated with derailments. Indeed, Calabrese and Roberts (2001) stated in their research on K-12 superintendents that context does not play a role in derailment. Future research should further investigate these contextual themes in an effort to assess whether or not higher education presidential derailments are distinctly different from the derailments which have been studied for 25 years in the for-profit business arena.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location of Interview:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Description of the study (read to interviewee):

“The purpose of this study is to describe the factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailment at private, liberal arts higher education institutions. This study involves four private, higher education institutions, and I will be interviewing individuals at each institution. The data collected from these interviews will be placed in a secure and locked office on the campus at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. To preserve confidentiality, all individual and institutional names and locations will be changed in the presentation of the data. The interview will be tape recorded and should take approximately one half to one hour.”

Have interviewee read and sign consent form

Questions:

I would like for you to think about the situation that occurred at your institution recently involving the departure of the last president. In answering each of the questions, please keep in mind that I am asking you to reflect on this particular situation and no other personnel issues at your institution.

1. What were the critical factors that lead to the derailment of the president?
2. What were the critical events that led to the derailment of the president?
3. Are there other important aspects of the derailment that we have not discussed?

Appendix B: IRB Form A

IRB #

Certification for Exemption from IRB Review for Research Involving Human Subjects

A. Principal Investigator(s) and/or Co-PI(s):

Principal Investigator: Mr. Jason McNeal

Co- Investigator: Dr. E. Grady Bogue

B. Department/Unit:

Higher Education Administration

C. Complete mailing address and phone number of PI(s) and Co-PI(s):

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Dr. Grady Bogue

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D. Title of the Project:

The Factors Associated with Presidential Derailment at Private, Liberal Arts Higher Education Institutions

E. External Funding Agency and ID Number: No external funding

F. Grant Submission Deadline: Not applicable

G. Starting Date: October 2006

H. Estimated Completion Date: December 2008

I. Research Project

a. Objective of the Project

The purpose of the study is to describe the factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailments at private, liberal arts higher education institutions. To qualify as a derailment, the president of the institution had to leave, not of his/her choosing, within five years of being hired.

- b. Subjects
One-on-one interviews will be conducted at four institutions that experienced a presidential derailment within the last two years. Current presidents, members of the governing board, vice presidents, and others with information concerning the derailment will be interviewed.
 - c. Methods or Procedures
One-half to one-hour interviews will be conducted. The interviews will focus on the derailment of the preceding president. The interviews will be audio-tape recorded and the researcher will take notes. Confidentiality for the participants will be maintained by the use of pseudonyms and code numbers on both the tape recordings and in the notes. Risks to study participants are minimal, however, participants can withdraw, without penalty, from the study at any time. All data will be stored in a locked office (Claxton 319) and only Mr. Jason McNeal and Dr. Grady Bogue will have access to the data.
 - d. Category for Exempt Research: 2
- J. Certification: The research described herein is in compliance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and presents subjects with no more than minimal risk as defined by applicable regulations.

Principal investigator:

Student advisor:

Dept. Review Committee Chair:

Approved:

Dept. Head:

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The Factors Associated with Presidential Derailment at Private,
Liberal Arts Higher Education Institutions

INTRODUCTION

As a leader of your institution, you are being invited to participate in this study. This study involves interviewing individuals who have knowledge of presidential derailments in higher education institutions. A derailed president is defined as one who leaves the institution non-voluntarily within five (5) years of being hired. The purpose of this study is to describe those factors perceived to be associated with presidential derailments at private, liberal arts higher education institutions.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

It is expected that our interview will last approximately one-hour. This interview will represent your complete involvement in the study. This interview will be audio-taped for the purposes of collecting our discussion verbatim.

RISKS

Although the risks associated with your involvement in this study are assessed as minimal, you can terminate your involvement in the study at any time.

BENEFITS

As research on presidential derailments have not been conducted in higher education, it is the aim of this study to extend the stream of knowledge with respect to the concept of derailment and also to provide governing boards and other agencies with information that may be useful in the presidential hiring process.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any and all data collected during the course of this study will be reported using pseudonyms for both participants and institutions. Data will be stored securely in a locked office on the University of Tennessee, Knoxville campus and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Jason McNeal at 513 Farmview Drive, Maryville, TN 865.850.1164. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research [Compliance Officer](#) at (865) 974-3466.

_____ Participant's initials

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed you data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Participant Letter

Date

First Name Last Name
Title
Institution
Address
City, State Zip

Dear First Name Last Name:

Recently, Doug Mason with Gonser, Gerber, Tinker, Stuhr, suggested that I contact you with respect to a campus leadership study that I am conducting. To fulfill requirements of the Ph.D. degree at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, I am conducting a dissertation study on the concept of “presidential derailment.” A derailed president is one who leaves the institution non-voluntarily prior to completing five (5) years in office. This study aims to shed light on the factors associated with presidential derailments in higher education and to compare these findings with those that have been observed in the for-profit business community.

My understanding is that your institution experienced a presidential derailment within the previous two years. I would like your assistance to learn more about this important leadership topic. Specifically, I would appreciate the opportunity to interview you, a member of your Board, a vice president, and others who have knowledge of this derailment situation. Each interview will last approximately one half to one hour and will be arranged so that it is convenient for each participant’s schedule. Full confidentiality for participants and the institutions involved will be insured and maintained at all times.

Within the next week, I will contact you via phone to answer any questions you may have regarding this study and your participation. I look forward to talking with you and thank you, in advance, for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Jason McNeal

VITA

Jason McNeal was born in Baltimore County, MD. Reared in Prince George's County, MD, he graduated from High Point High School in 1987. After graduating from Salisbury State University (MD) in 1991 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, he worked for two years with the Food Marketing Institute in Washington, D.C., as coordinator of educational services. In 1999 he completed two Master of Science degrees from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and began his career in higher education by serving as the director of advancement at East Georgia College.

In 2001, he accepted the position of annual giving director at Maryville College (TN) and, over the next seven years was promoted three times, ultimately serving as the institution's vice president for advancement and community relations. During the summer of 2008 he accepted a partner-track position with Gonser Gerber Tinker Stuhr LLP, a national advancement consulting firm located in Chicago, IL.

Jason completed Harvard University's Management Development Program in Higher Education during the summer of 2004 and, in the summer of 2005, began pursuit of the Ph.D. degree in higher education administration at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He lives in Maryville, TN with his wife Heather, their daughter Shelby, and their son Samuel.