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A STUDY OF PRESIDENTIAL DERAILMENT  
IN PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

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

Keith S. Carver, Jr.  
December 2009

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## **DEDICATION**

To my wife, Hollianne, my daughter, Carson Elizabeth, and my sons, Jack T. and Britton. You supported me throughout my educational journey, surrendering family time to allow me to complete this project. I love all of you very much.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this interpretive, multiple case qualitative study was to explore factors associated with presidential derailments in public research universities. The case studies involved interviews, document analysis, and observation. The population consisted of four public research universities in the United States. These varied and diverse sources of information produced the data for the investigation.

The findings revealed five derailment themes among the four cases. These were: problems with interpersonal relationships, poor selection of advisors, flawed search processes, unethical behavior, and the failure of the president to change or adapt to the new organization upon assuming the presidency. Three of the five themes from public research universities related directly to Leslie and Van Velsor's (1996) derailment themes from the corporate sector. These were: problems with interpersonal relationships, inability to build or lead a team (poor selection of advisors), and the inability to change or adapt to the culture of an organization during a transition (failure to change or adapt to the new organization upon assuming the presidency).

Finally, implications for preventing presidential derailments and for improvement in the presidential selection process are presented.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### Background of the Study

Leadership is about people influencing other people. Leadership has become a popular topic, with over 15,000 articles and books published on the subject over the past 50 years (Burke, 2006). The decisions and actions of leaders have a lasting impact on their followers and their organizations.

*Leaders Make a Difference in Organizational Performance.* Effective top-level leaders foster leadership throughout the levels of an organization if that organization is to continue to grow and prosper (DeSpain, 2000; Ray, 1999). DeSpain (2000) added that if a leader cannot foster commitment in an organization, then “there is no leader” (p. 39).

#### Leadership Effectiveness and Influence

Contemporary leadership literature frequently describes successful leaders as being intimately intertwined with their organizations. Collins conducted a thorough, comparative study of twenty-eight Fortune 500 companies over a fifteen-year span (Collins, 2001). As a result of this research, Collins determined that the eleven companies that made transformational strides in their respective industry were led by executives that hired the right people and set forth the vision for the company. Collins went on to say that “great vision without great people is irrelevant” (p. 42).

While there are numerous examples of effective leadership in the for-profit sector, one shining example of such leadership is the Costco company’s Jim Sinegal, the corporation’s Chief Executive Officer (Hindery, 2005). Based in Issaquah, Washington,

this retail giant competes with Target, Sears, and Kmart. Costco's biggest competitor, however, is Sam's Club (of the Wal-Mart Corporation). Costco is focused on treating their employees well. Sinegal and the Costco board of directors offer Costco employees some of the best benefits to employees in the retail business, including:

- higher pay (Costco's pay begins at \$10 per hour; after four years, a Costco cashier can be earning \$44,000, including bonuses)
- insurance (Costco pays 92% of its employees' health care costs)
- union involvement (one in every six Costco employees belongs to a union)

Perhaps the most important result of these great benefits is loyalty. For example, there is limited turnover at Costco (17% as compared to 44% at Wal-Mart). It is the corporate practice of the Costco board to give back to the employees in the form of salary and benefits. Sinegal claims that profit sharing by employees is the right thing to do and that the Costco employees are what make the company successful. According to Sinegal, "they're entitled to buy homes and live in reasonably nice neighborhoods and send their children to school" (p. 134).

The employees are empowered by their leaders, and their productivity shows in the company's profit margin. In 2003, there were 532 Sam's Club warehouse stores, which brought in approximately \$33 billion in sales revenue. By comparison, Costco had 312 stores (220 fewer stores than Sam's Club), but brought in \$34.5 billion in revenue. Additionally, Costco's U.S. operating profit per hourly employee in 2003 was \$13,647 versus \$11,039 at Sam's Club. The Costco employees take pride in their work because their leadership has their best interests in mind.

In the non-profit sector, there are similar examples. Habitat for Humanity provides one such example. Habitat's founder and long-time president, Millard Fuller,

developed the concept of building “modest but good and solid homes for low-income families using what we call the Bible finance plan or the economics of Jesus and sell them at no profit and no interest” (Olcott, 1994, p. 6). Currently the organization has expanded into 92 countries, and the yearly revenues top \$357 million. The new Chief Financial Officer, Lyn Jensen, left the corporate sector to direct the non-profit organization. “It isn’t about the money. This is where I am supposed to be” (L.C., 2006, p. 69). The organization has doubled since 2004, but it is Jensen’s primary objective to “build an infrastructure that will allow exponential growth within the framework of a ministry” (L.C., 2006, p. 69).

#### Leader Derailment and Lack of Effectiveness

Conversely, mistakes and bad decisions by leaders can cripple an organization. “Great leaders, when they go askew, do great damage” (Tropman & Shaefer, 2004, p. 170). It is, therefore, important to examine the factors associated with the derailment of an executive that impede him or her from achieving full promise and potential. Derailment is a phenomenon that is not often discussed in leadership literature. A promising line of research on leadership derailment has been developing in the for-profit sector, but little research has been conducted in non-profit organizations. Even less research has been completed in higher education. This study will specifically explore factors associated with derailment of presidents in public research universities.

Derailment has been defined as the phenomenon that occurs “when a talented, promising leader’s career unexpectedly wanders off track” (Zemke, 2003, p. 12). The Center for Creative Leadership has defined derailment as an executive who leaves an organization against his/her will (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). Derailment is also

described as one who is removed from a position when the person wants or intends to keep moving the organization forward (Brubaker & Coble, 1997). For the purpose of this study, a derailed president is defined as a sitting university president who departs his or her position nonvoluntarily before he or she has completed five years of work.

*Derailment in For-Profit Organizations.* Much of the research that has been published about derailment has come from the for-profit sector. Recent literature points to many associated themes for executive derailment. Richard Hagberg (1996) described four problem behavioral areas for executives: poor communication and social skills, inability to make decisions, low self-esteem combined with an attitude for perfection, and poor leadership skills. Richard Cosier, Dean of Purdue University's Krannert Graduate School of Management, added that greed, loss of focus, poor change management, a failure to listen, and simple bad luck can also cause derailment (Jusko, 2002).

Lombardo and McCauley (1988) developed six "flaw scales"(p. 2-3) for executives and managers that can lead to derailment, including problems with interpersonal relationships, difficulty in molding a staff, difficulty making strategic transitions, lack of follow through, overdependence and strategic differences with management. Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) conducted a large-scale study that examined derailment data in both North America and Europe. This research revealed nine derailment themes prevalent in North America, but two themes were more prominent than the others. Over 50% of the respondents in the study mentioned that the "inability to develop or adapt" and "poor working relationships" lead to executives being derailed in their careers (Leslie and Van Velsor, 1996, p. 5-6).

Emerging stars in the workplace are often placed on the “fast tracks” of their workplaces, with their “obvious strengths of taking charge and solving problems well” (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989, p. 4). Ironically, these strengths may be connected to derailing characteristics, as “they are often impatient, don’t listen well, are independent to the point that work relationships suffer, and like to solve problems alone” (p. 4). These managers can hurt an organization, as “those who are independent to a fault may be weak team-builders; those who develop a limited knowledge of self may become overdependent or treat others poorly” (p. 6).

Executives who derail can hurt an organization in another way: the financial bottom line. Hagberg (1996) noted that the cost of replacing an employee can be between 100-150 percent of an annual salary and this number could be even higher for executive level positions.

*Derailment in Non-profit Organizations.* There are fewer pieces of research on derailment in the non-profit sector, but the impact of derailment is perhaps more severe than in the private sector (Tropman & Schaefer, 2004). Executive derailment in the non-profit sector can not only harm the person and organization, but can also shed a dark shadow “on the movement or field in which he or she is engaged as a whole” (Tropman & Schaefer, 2004, p. 162). These researchers point to four stages of problems that executives in non-profits encounter, including:

- 1) detour- not having a true sense of purpose or direction for a short while,
- 2) prederailment- when a sense of or direction is not found,
- 3) derailment- a reprimand or termination, and

- 4) flameout/calamity- a “destructive episode in which a senior executive loses, or almost loses, his position in a spectacular way that includes but greatly exceeds self-harm.”

*Derailment in Education.* Little research has been conducted regarding derailment in the educational setting. Brubaker and Coble (1997) studied derailment in the K-12 system. Their research showed that the primary causes leading to derailment for principals and assistant principals were: incompetence, external political conflict, internal political conflict, difficulties with leadership processes, diminished desire to learn and improve, legal and/or moral problems, and personal reasons. Brubaker and Coble found that incompetence and external political conflict were the most often cited reasons for derailment.

Calabrese and Roberts (2001) conducted a derailment study that focused on high school principals and superintendents. They concluded that derailment in this setting was most often caused by character flaws in the individual, and that individuals that placed self-interest above group goals were most likely to derail.

Even less research has been focused on derailment in higher education than in other levels of education. Dr. Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., former president of the University of Virginia, once stated:

Presidential leadership requires a clear conception of the educational purposes, ideals, and goals of the particular college or university, the ability to express them in speech and writing, the capacity to inspire agreement upon the objectives and enthusiasm for obtaining them (as cited in Kamm, 1982, p. 48).

The college president is an important figure in the life and vitality of the campus community. College presidents run extensive and complex organizations, perform a

diverse number of administrative duties, and are caretakers of the academic programs on campus (Benezet, Katz, & Magnusson, 1981).

Currently, university campuses are experiencing dramatic turnover at the top. A recent study (Padilla & Goosh, 2000) found that the average tenure of university presidents was in decline. Presidential tenure averages have not experienced such low levels since the 1960s. The results of this research showed that the tenure for university presidents has been declining over the past 30 years, and that the tenure of public university presidents is much lower than that of private university presidents.

Padilla and Goosh (2000) discovered that the average length of tenure for a president of a public university is 5.7 years and the presidents of private universities averaged 8.8 years. Padilla and Goosh (2000) went on to state that the tenure length of university presidents will continue to decrease, and that public university presidents tenure will decline at a more rapid rate than their private school counterparts.

American universities will soon face an interesting situation, as college presidents are becoming older. In 1986, 42% of presidents were aged 50 or younger, and 14% were 61 or older. In 2006, only 8% were aged 50 or younger and the number of presidents 61 or older increased to 49%. These numbers represent an imminent trend of significant transition and turnover on America's campuses as a result of retirements (American Council on Education, 2007).

University campuses are facing another dilemma that impacts the length of presidential tenure, derailment. The majority of research conducted on derailment has focused on the for-profit sector, but colleges and universities are not immune to executive level derailment. Examples of this have recently involved controversial presidential

resignations at both the University of Colorado (Fain, 2005) and the University of Tennessee (Basinger, 2001).

The derailment of an individual in a management position can cost the organization over 20 times that executive's salary in direct and indirect costs (Gentry, Mondore, & Cox, 2007). Likewise, presidential derailments are costly to universities in particular. These events cost educational institutions real dollars that are increasingly in short supply. Derailments are also costly in terms of public relations and in an overall loss of confidence in the institutions that suffer through the derailment phenomenon. Strategies that may help prevent such leadership disasters are worthy of further consideration.

The derailment situation on the university campus certainly merits serious investigation. Bogue (1994) notes that college campuses are “not structural, symbolic, and social configurations free from love and license, sacrifice and selfishness, passion and prejudice, morality and meanness” (p. xii). The impact of university presidential derailment is long-lasting for the campus, as searches often take up to a year to complete and can also damage institutional morale and reputation (Basinger, 2001).

#### Statement of the Problem

It is an important exercise to determine executive derailment characteristics in a higher education setting. Abrupt terminations and dismissals of presidents can encumber the academic mission of a campus (Basinger, 2001), damage the public image of the institution (Fischer, 2005), and fracture faculty and staff morale (Fain, 2005). Unfortunately, little derailment research has been conducted outside the for-profit sector (Tropman & Shaefer, 2004). Even less research is found on the leadership pitfalls facing

today's college presidents (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). An exploratory look into the characteristics associated with presidential derailment is needed in order to fill a void in contemporary higher education research.

### Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors associated with presidential derailments in a public research university setting. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What are the factors associated with presidential derailment?
2. What events led to the derailment of the president?
3. What relationship, if any, may be found between derailment factors emerging from previous Center for Creative Leadership research and factors emerging from this study?

For the purpose of this study, derailment was defined as the situation that occurs when a sitting university president is nonvoluntarily released within five years of taking the position.

### Conceptual Framework

The Center for Creative Leadership has identified four dominant derailment themes from research on private corporations over the past twenty years (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). Leslie and Van Velsor interviewed twenty executives from North American Fortune 500 companies. In Europe, the team conducted sessions with forty-two senior business executives. All of the interviewees were asked to think about two examples of managers from their personal experience. The first example was to be a manager that had successfully made it to the pinnacle of their organization. The second

manager was someone that had great potential, but had not successfully made the transition to the top, (i.e., had derailed). In addition to the interviews, each executive was given a SYMLOG (Systematic Multiple-Level Observation of Groups) form. This form involved a twenty-six item questionnaire that measured leadership and teamwork values, and it added validity to the interviews.

Four central derailment themes emerged from their research. These themes were problems with interpersonal relationships, a failure to meet business objectives, the inability to build and lead a team, and the inability to change or adapt during a transition. Each of these four indicators is described below:

Problems with interpersonal relationships. Managers who had problems with relationships struggled with their own personality as a barrier to effective leadership.

Failure to meet business objectives. Managers who had difficulty meeting objectives usually had a background that utilized a specific technical skill or performed a job with little decision-making responsibility. These managers often struggled as they get promoted and were forced to deal with more change or greater ambiguity in their roles (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

Inability to build or lead a team. Managers who derailed because of problems stemming from their inability to build or lead a team usually struggle with some sort of strong personality traits (e.g., aggressiveness, tunnel vision). Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

Inability to change or adapt during a transition. Managers who derail because of traits associated with change often struggle with transitions, such as dealing with a new

boss, the inability to adapt new job skills, and the inability to meet the demands of their new role (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

While these themes were associated with a for-profit context, it is useful to explore these themes in a non-profit setting. This study provides a complementary examination of whether the derailment factors found in this study have any relationship with those derailment factors uncovered in the Center for Creative Leadership research (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). This study seeks to discover whether these themes in the corporate sector will be found in collegiate organizations, or whether the character of collegiate organizations and the leadership of them suggest additional or different themes associated with derailment.

#### Significance of the Study

This study initiated research on the derailment behavior of university presidents in public research institutions. It extended research set forth in the corporate sector and provide a complementary examination of whether the derailment factors found in this study have any relationship with those derailment factors uncovered in research on for-profit entities, thereby filling a gap in the literature. The results will be useful to boards and state agencies as a way to identify derailment behaviors in their current presidents, and assist these organizations with developing intervention strategies. At the same time, such information may help them to choose their future presidents more effectively.

#### Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study involved the situation that arises when dealing with sensitive research. McCosker, Barnard, and Gerber (2001) state that there are many topics that “within specific cultural and social context are ‘sensitive.’ They may be

defined as ‘sensitive’ if they are private, stressful or sacred, and discussion tends to generate an emotional response.” Their research examined possible reactions when studying topics that were subject to controversy. The study states:

. . . the perceived risk may be psychological and/or physical in nature. They conclude that any data collection process, irrespective of the methodology, is that asking people questions about their views, knowledge, attitudes or life experiences, particularly related to "sensitive" phenomena, may generate emotional responses that should be acknowledged by the researcher and the research process (McCosker, Barnard, & Gerber, 2001, paragraph 33).

The study also encountered incomplete data or occasionally missing data because the participants were unwilling to share feelings and experiences. The sensitive nature of presidential derailments led to a reluctance of certain individuals to participate in the current study.

#### Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited to a sample of four public research universities. Thus, the results of this study are applicable to the institutions surveyed, and may not be applicable to all public institutions.

Additionally, this study was limited by its focus on public research universities. The number of derailments at such institutions was limited, meaning that the findings may not speak to derailment at other types of institutions of higher education.

#### Definitions

This study required operational definitions for two main terms: derailment and public research university. First, derailment was defined as the situation that occurs when a university president leaves the institution nonvoluntarily within five year of being hired.

A public research university was defined as an academic institution that falls under the RU/VH (Research University with Very High research activity) classification of the Carnegie Foundation (2007) for the Advancement of Teaching. These institutions annually award doctorates in science, engineering, technology, mathematics, humanities, and the social sciences. They can also offer professional programs in law business, education, engineering, public policy, and social work. The institutions chosen for this study may or may not have a medical or a veterinary school.

### Organization of the Study

The study was divided into five chapters. Chapter I introduces the study and includes the statement of the problem, the research questions, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the limitation and delimitations of the study along with the definition for derailment. Chapter II includes a review of the relevant literature on derailment in for-profit and non-profit settings. Chapter III chronicles the methods used in the study, including research design, the site and population, procedures, data collection, data analysis procedures, and issues of validity and reliability. Chapter IV will provide a report of the findings of the study as they relate to the research questions. Chapter V will present the summary and discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature review in Chapter II. Chapter V also presents conclusions and make recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As the demands of leadership have changed, so has what leaders need to be to meet those demands. The balances have slid away from technical certainties to dealing with complex, ambiguous leadership situations; from independence to interdependence and team-building; and from directiveness to mutual understanding (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989, p. 6).

#### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the factors associated with presidential derailments in a public research university setting. This chapter provides a literature review of the research and literature related to the study. It is addressed in four sections. The first section provides an examination of current attitudes about leadership effectiveness. The second section focuses on derailment in for-profit business settings. The third section examines derailment in the non-profit sector. The final section describes the conceptual framework that is used for this study.

#### Leadership Effectiveness and Influence

Fisher, Tack, & Wheeler (1988) stated “so it is with effectiveness: Studies of presidents in general are worthwhile, but the study of effectiveness in the presidency, although complex, is warranted, legitimate, and exciting” (p. 7). To fully understand this study, leadership effectiveness must be more closely examined.

Leadership is not solely about an individual’s actions, but also how that leader’s actions are interpreted and how those actions impact organizations (Birnbaum, 1992). Leaders also give credibility to an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 1995) and develop the

values that not only motivate and strengthen the individual workers, but also make the organization more competitive in the marketplace (Badaracco & Ellsworth, 1989).

Kouzes and Posner (1995) believe that there are five essential elements that contribute to good, solid leadership role, including the ability to challenge the process; inspire a shared vision; enable others to act; model the way; and encourage the heart. These five elements enabled ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary tasks for their organizations.

Others believe that effective leaders are those that move their organization toward goal attainment – a basis for judging performance. Today’s effective leaders must be able to adapt to change and align individual jobs with the company’s strategic goals (Blazek & Stevens, 2006, p. 16).

In an academic context, Bogue (1994) offers several conditions of effective leadership, including:

1. *Condition of Longevity/Survival.* Bogue writes that it takes “long-term investments and commitment” (p. 140) to be an effective leader. Leaders should be judged for their effectiveness over a period of time, not for the short term.
2. *Condition of Mission and Goal Achievement.* Leaders serve as more than a mere “officeholder” (p. 140). Outcomes must be a part of defining the effectiveness of a leader.
3. *Condition of Organizational Integrity.* Leaders keep their organizations clear of accusations of mismanagement or suspicions of dishonorable action.

Leaders make certain that their team members uphold the mission of the organization with integrity (p. 141).

4. Condition of Faculty-Staff Diversity. Leaders must strive for progress in areas of equity and diversity (p. 142).
5. Condition of Constituent Satisfaction. Leaders treat all their constituents with respect and dignity. While disagreements will occur, effective leaders can develop a climate where people can feel both appreciated and opinions can be expressed. Regardless of debate or the direction of public discourse, leaders create an environment in which people can disagree “without fear of threat or reprisal” (p. 142).
6. Condition of Leadership *Climate*. Leaders move their organizations ahead, despite any distractions from current challenges in the economic or political climate. While times can be troubling, leaders must stay the course and look to moving the organization forward (p. 143).
7. *Condition of Colleague Growth and Development*. Leaders nurture their colleagues and aid in their personal and professional development. Bogue states that “the growth of faculty and staff colleagues and the development of students are important indicators of leadership effectiveness. Leaders are teachers. Teachers are learners” (p. 143).

Fisher et al. (1988) collected data on effective college presidents through the use of surveys and extensive interviews. The results showed that effective presidents have characteristics such as

1. *Have vision.* Effective presidents have a clear sense of where the institution is, and where it is headed (p. 23)
2. *Have a high energy level.* The duties of the college president “require great stamina and dedication to the job unparalleled in others” (p. 24).
3. *They are visible.* The effective president realizes that he/she must be an ambassador for the college to numerous internal and external audiences (p. 25).
4. *Relate well to others.* The effective college president must be able to relate to a wide variety of audiences, from hourly employees to trustees to members of the general assembly (p. 26).
5. *Draw respect and admiration.* Even if every decision is not popular, the effective college president is respected for her/his commitment to the job and the institution (p. 28).
6. *Are bold decision makers.* Effective presidents have the courage to make difficult decisions (p. 30).
7. *Use power well.* Effective collegiate leaders know how to use the power and influence of their office to move the institution forward (p. 32).
8. *Have a positive self-image.* College presidents have confidence in their ability to lead the institution (p. 35).
9. *Are trusting and trustworthy.* Effective collegiate leaders must not only earn the trust of their constituent audiences, but the president must also learn to trust those same audiences (p. 36).

10. *Have a sense of humor.* “A joke or a smile eases tension and stills troubled waters, thus facilitating group interaction without creating overt hostility” (p. 37).
11. *Believe in shared governance.* Effective college presidents seek advice from others, including those “to be affected by various decisions” (p. 37).
12. *Believe in the underlying goals of the organization.* College presidents need to be totally committed to the goals, mission, and purpose of the institution (p. 39).
13. *Demonstrate that the organization is the leader.* The effective college president can create an environment that “bonds diverse constituents together to achieve common goals” (p. 40).

The notion of accountability is equally as important as the notion of leadership (Gardner, 1990). There are many problems that challenge accountability and leadership effectiveness in the workplace, such as fragmentation, the loss of shared values, and the difficulty of reconciling antagonistic forces within an organization. Another challenge is to bring a sense of renewal to their organizations. Just like human beings, organizations go through periods of growth. In order to survive and remain effective, renewal is necessary. Some of this renewal involves a continual evaluation of an organization's values. Over time, organizational values can become “encrusted with hypocrisy, corroded by cynicism, or simply abandoned” (Gardner, 1990, p. 122). Leaders need to be able to recognize when renewal and change are necessary to ensure the continued health and vitality of an organization.

Do leaders have to be ethical to be effective? Effective leadership most certainly has an ethical aspect. Hitt (1990) states that ethics and leadership are dependent upon one another.

An ethical environment is conducive to effective leadership, and effective leadership is conducive to ethics. Effective leadership is a consequence of ethical conduct, and ethical conduct is a consequence of effective leadership. Ethics and leadership function as both cause and effect (p. 1).

Certainly, history is filled with examples of leaders who were effective in their efforts to mobilize and lead, but their motives or outcomes were questionable. Kellerman (2004) states that:

We resist even considering the possibility that the dynamic between Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his most ardent followers had anything in common with the dynamic between Adolph Hitler and his most ardent followers; or that John Biggs, the admired former CEO of TIAA/CREF, has skills and capacities similar in some ways to those of Richard Scrushy, the disgraced former CEO of HealthSouth (p. 8).

Kellerman goes on to describe a condition she calls “Hitler’s ghost” (p.11).

If we pretend that there is no elephant and that bad leadership is unrelated to good leadership, if we pretend to know the one without knowing the other, we will in the end distort the enterprise. We cannot distance ourselves from even the most extreme example- Hitler- by bestowing on him another name, such as “power wielder.” Not only was his impact on twentieth-century history arguably greater than anyone else’s, but also he was brilliantly skilled at inspiring, mobilizing, and directing followers. His use of coercion notwithstanding, if this is not leadership, what is (p. 11)?

Specific behaviors that render a leader ineffective have been identified by Kellerman (2004). After collecting “hundreds of contemporary cases involving bad leaders and bad followers in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors (p. 39)”, Kellerman identified seven groups of ineffective leaders, including:

1. Incompetent— lack the “will or skill” to maintain action,
2. rigid— “unwilling or unable to adapt to new ideas, new information, or changing times”,
3. intemperate— lacking self-control,
4. callous— “uncaring and unkind;” ignores needs of other team members),
5. corrupt— lies, steals, and cheats; puts self-interest before goals,
6. insular— “minimize or disregard the health and welfare” of those outside the organization, and
7. evil— “use pain as an instrument of power.”

Burke (2006) expounded upon Kellerman’s seven traits, stating that the first three traits are due to incompetence; and the last four traits are of an unethical nature.

“Ineffective leaders fail to achieve the desired results or to bring about positive changes due to falling short. Unethical leaders fail to distinguish between right and wrong” (p. 93).

Other factors associated with ineffective leadership traits included greed, loss of focus, poor change management, and a failure to listen (Jusko, 2002). Hagberg (1996) believed that ineffective leaders lack social and communication skills, have difficulty making decisions, possess a sense of perfectionism paired with a low sense of self-esteem and an inability to control emotions, and have poor basic leadership skills. Hagberg further stated that executives who are under duress are often so preoccupied with their own problems that they have a difficult time caring for the good of the organization. Hagberg developed these factors after administering a personality questionnaire to over

25,000 participants. This questionnaire looked at numerous dimensions of personality, including warmth, independence, order, dominance, and anxiety.

Clearly, ethics and ethical behavior has an important place in the heart of effective leadership. Ciulla (2004) stated that the primary question regarding leadership was not to simply define the nature of leadership, but to define good leadership. A good leader is both ethical and effective. Some people are ethical but not effective, and others are effective and not ethical. There is a blurred line separating ethics and effectiveness in leadership. “Sometimes being ethical is being effective and sometimes being effective is being ethical. In other words, ethics is effectiveness in certain situations” (Ciulla, 2004, p. 310).

#### Derailment in the For-Profit Sector

Several studies have focused on derailment in the for-profit sector, with a focus on the personality traits that lead toward ineffective management. Bill Byham, chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Development Dimensions International in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania identified eleven traits that characterize derailment, including:

1. approval dependent: need constant praise and approval from authority figures,
2. argumentative: distrustful and focused on protecting their own self-interests,
3. arrogant: too confident or self-assured; poor listening skills,
4. attention-seeking: excessively charming or persuasive; self-promoting,
5. distant: preoccupied with own agendas; address issues covertly,
6. eccentric: creative to the point of being odd,
7. imperceptive (aloof): not being able to read others' behavior or intent,

8. impulsive: unpredictable and impatient,
9. perfectionist: controlling and demanding of others in the organization,
10. risk averse (cautious): Indecisive and reluctant to take action, and
11. volatile: have trouble controlling emotions; moody.

These traits were developed by Byham's company through a series of behavioral interviews with corporate executives across North America. All characteristics of derailment can be corrected through intervention (Zemke, 2003, p. 12).

Much of the current derailment research comes from the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Center for Creative Leadership is a nonprofit organization founded in 1970 that focuses on the study of leadership and leadership practices. The organization regularly publishes books, reports, and articles that examine and evaluate leadership ideas and concepts. Lombardo and McCauley (1988), in a report published by the Center for Creative Leadership, developed six flaw scales for executives and managers that can lead to derailment, including problems with interpersonal relationships, difficulty in molding a staff, difficulty making strategic transitions, lack of follow through, overdependence and strategic differences with management. This data was gathered in an empirical study that analyzed the results of a prior study by the same researchers (1983) with a database of 355 bosses' ratings of managers. The emerging themes were collapsed into the six flaw scales.

Using the information gathered in the 1988 research, Lombardo and Eichinger (1989) built upon the previous study and focused on derailment behaviors that could be detected early in the careers of entry and mid-level managers. The purpose of this research was centered on an intervention to prevent those with executive managerial

promise from traveling down a path toward derailment. The study first examined how executives developed, and which ones eventually derailed. The research showed that patterns of derailment develop over time. “Patterns of excellence change as managers who were once rewarded for standout individual contributions are later expected to orchestrate a network, team build, and see that things are done rather than do many tasks alone” (p. 6).

Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) conducted an extensive study for the Center for Creative Leadership that evaluated different derailment themes that emerged in interviews with North American business executives and another set of interviews with their European counterparts. Until this time, the majority of the derailment literature focused on business executives in the United States.

The research team interviewed twenty executives from North American Fortune 500 companies. In Europe, the team conducted sessions with forty-two senior business executives. All interviewees were asked to think about two examples of managers from their personal experience. The first example was to be a manager that had successfully made it to the pinnacle of their organization. The second manager was someone that had great potential, but had not successfully made the transition to the top. In addition to the interviews, each executive was given a SYMLOG (Systematic Multiple-Level Observation of Groups) form. This form included a questionnaire that measured leadership and teamwork values. The questionnaire added validity to the interviews.

Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) determined four central derailment themes that developed. These themes were 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.

*Problems with interpersonal relationships.* Managers who have problems with relationships struggle with their own personality as a barrier to effective leadership. Overambition and self-interest on an excessive level are characteristics of this theme (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988). Such personalities are often seen as aloof, non-caring, and demanding (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

*Failure to meet business objectives.* Managers who have difficulty meeting objectives usually have a background that utilized a specific technical skill or performed a job with little decision-making responsibility. These managers often struggle as they get promoted and are forced to deal with more change or greater ambiguity in their roles (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). They often fail because of a lack of follow through (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988).

*Inability to build or lead a team.* Managers who derail because of problems stemming from their inability to build or lead a team usually struggle with some sort of strong personality trait (e.g., aggressiveness, tunnel vision). These traits might be beneficial as the manager is working his or her way up the corporate hierarchy. However, once executive levels of management are reached, these traits should be complimented with a sense of teamwork and collaboration (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

One senior executive in the 1996 Center for Creative Leadership study stated that:

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. Followership is

critical, especially in downsizing organizations. People don't want to see you only when there is a downsizing announcement to be made. People want to know what's in it for them and if the person leading them knows and cares about them enough. Today, if you're going to spill your blood for the organization, it will be because of personal loyalty to your team, not to some abstract organization (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996, p. 21).

Managers who fall under this derailment theme are also described as overmanagers and lacking the ability to staff effectively (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988).

*Inability to change or adapt during a transition.* Managers who derail because of traits associated with change often struggle with transitions, such as dealing with a new boss, the inability to adapt new job skills, and the inability to meet the demands of their new role (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996). This trait also can be characterized by an inability to agree with higher level executives about the running of the organization. This trait is not always a flaw, but it can lead to derailment “through inability to sell a position or to adapt to a boss with a different style” (Lombardo & McCauley, 1988, p. 4).

Organizational culture is the result of a long history of experiences shared by the members of that organization. The customs, practices, values, and attitudes that evolve among constituents of the university must be recognized and respected by the leader of the organization before successful changes can be attempted. Failure to recognize the importance of organizational culture to the individuals who work within that culture inevitably leads to resentment and resistance rather than progress. Schein (2004) summarizes the importance of this cultural phenomenon:

If we understand the dynamics of culture we will be less likely to be puzzled, irritated, and anxious when we encounter the unfamiliar and seemingly irrational behavior of people in organizations, and we will have a deeper understanding not only of why various groups of people or organizations can be so different, but also why it is so hard to change them. Even more important, if we understand culture better we will better understand ourselves—better understand the forces

acting within us that define who we are, that reflect the groups with which we identify and to which we want to belong” (p. 10). “. . . it can be argued that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is their ability to understand and work with culture” (p. 11).

Shipper and Dillard (2000) suggest that derailment in the for-profit sector can occur at any time in a manager’s career, but that recovery is always an option for the manager. The study revealed that “managers who underestimated their skills are more likely to recover than those who either accurately estimate or overestimate their skills” (p. 331).

### Derailment in the Non-Profit Sector

Non-profit organizations are not immune to leader derailment. Executive derailment in the non-profit sector can not only harm the individual, but also the organization and the cause (Tropman & Shafer, 2004). Tropman and Shafer’s study determined four stages of problems that executives in non-profits encounter, including detours, prederailment, derailment, and flameout/calamity. These problems were formulated after examining articles from the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other national papers that have derailment stories on executives. Their research ran from 1993 to 2004. They compared themes from these articles against the research of Van Velsor & Leslie (1995) and John Glasser (1994).

For Tropman and Shaefer (2004), derailment is just one stage of what is referred to as executive decompensation.

The first stage of executive decompensation is classified as a detour. Detours are characterized as behaviors that lead an executive away from the essential tasks of the job. Detours may include unnecessary or excessive travel, spending too much time in their

menial tasks, or spending too much time in meaningless meetings. Detours are usually not harmful to the life of an executive, as long as these detours are short-lived.

The next stage of executive decompensation is prederailment. Prederailment occurs when executives continue with detours for an extended time. Prederailment can be difficult to identify, as so many non-profit executives have great freedom in how to conduct their daily business.

Stage three of executive decompensation is called derailment. Derailment includes the identification of bad behavioral issues, a question about personal ethics, or a loss of trust. At this stage, an executive can either be terminated or reprimanded by a board of directors. Most executives in the derailment stage are surprised by the reprimand or firing, and that the action usually results from a “specific personal behavior of the derailed executive” (Tropman & Shaefer, 2004, p. 167).

The final stage of executive decompensation is flameout/calamity. This stage is the most public and costly to the non-profit organization. The flameout portion occurs when the executive participates in a series of self-destructive behaviors that are harmful to both the individual and the organization. The calamity portion covers sensitive public issues that arise out of this situation, including damage to the individual, their families, and the organization’s image.

The causes of executive flameout/calamity are described using a framework entitled the Five C Theory of Organizational Analysis: Characteristics, Competencies, Conditions, Contexts, and Change. Characteristics refer to the personal characteristics, personality, and temperament of the executive. Competencies reference the unique skill sets that each executive brings to their particular job. Conditions are the underlying

culture and structure of the organization. Contexts refer to the culture and structure outside of the organization. Change points to unavoidable changes and adjustments. Each of these themes has a unique way of affecting non-profit executives.

Of the Five Cs, two of the elements, conditions and context, are most important in examining problems that executives in non-profits encounter. Conditions refer to the subculture of the organization and the control structures that can keep an executive in check (Tropman & Shafer, 2004, p. 171). Context describes the structure and culture that exist outside the organization. Preventing executive derailment in non-profits is the responsibility of both those in the organization (conditions) and those in governing bodies outside the organization (context).

The derailment themes are similar in for-profit and non-profit organizations. Control issues, inflexibility in thought, and a failure to communicate are just a few of the themes that run parallel through both non-profit and for-profit groups.

### Summary

In summary, there is much discussion about the derailment phenomenon—particularly in the for-profit sector. Like their corporate counterparts, the contemporary college president plays an essential role in the welfare of the campus community. It has already been established that defining factors that can lead to derailment is essential for maintaining excellence in leadership in the corporate world. It is also crucial to determine executive derailment characteristics in a higher education setting. Research has been limited in terms of derailment and higher education. This study will utilize a for-profit derailment conceptual framework to research derailment themes prevalent in public research university settings.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the factors associated with presidential derailments in a public research university setting. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What are the factors associated with presidential derailment?
2. What events led to the derailment of the president?
3. What relationship, if any, may be found between derailment factors emerging from previous Center for Creative Leadership research and factors emerging from this study?

This chapter addresses the research design, research sites and populations, sources of data, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures that were utilized in this study.

#### Research Design

A qualitative approach, multiple case study design, was used in this study of derailments of public research university presidents. Using a qualitative approach allowed for an in depth, chronological examination of events associated with derailment and for building a rich, descriptive explanation of the process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The approach allowed the researcher to understand a situation without imposing predetermined attitudes on the phenomenon under study (Mertens, 1998). The qualitative

approach permitted the study to be exploratory and descriptive in nature. Little research had been conducted on derailment at the executive level of public higher education.

Multiple case design was the method chosen for the conduct of the study. A case study method is appropriate when questions involving “how” or “why” are being posed (Yin, 2003), as in this study. Case study design allowed for studying a phenomenon that is relatively unknown and probing that phenomenon in depth. The phenomenon under study was derailment at public research universities and the four cases used were institutions where such derailment occurred.

This multiple case study design was interpretive. Since this study was based on a theoretical framework derived from research focused on derailment in the for-profit sector, the results derived from this multiple case study allowed for an informing comparison of the themes that develop in higher education and those that developed out of the Center for Creative Leadership’s 1996 research (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996).

#### Research Sites and Population

The sites consisted of public research universities in the United States that had experienced a presidential derailment in the last seven years. For the purpose of this study, derailment was defined as a sitting university president who departs from his or her position nonvoluntarily before he or she has completed five years of work. From this sample of institutions, at least three people who had knowledge of factors and conditions associated with the derailed president were interviewed on each campus.

The institutions were selected from a list generated by the Atlanta, Georgia consulting firm of Alexander Haas Martin & Partners. Founded in 1954, Alexander Haas Martin & Partners serves as a philanthropic consulting firm to colleges, universities, and

non-profit organizations. Two of the firm's partners agreed to assist in identifying sites that had experienced a presidential derailment.

The researcher also employed the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) for recommendations of research sites. In addition to these two sources, the researcher utilized the *Chronicle of Higher Education* to identify potential sites. This list was narrowed by excluding any institution that was not a public, research university or whose president had a tenure that lasted longer than five years.

From the list of qualified institutions, a purposeful sample of ten institutions was selected. Letters were sent to the current president of each institution in the sample, asking the current president to participate in the study. The majority of the institutions did not respond, and phone calls were placed to each institution that did not respond. In many cases, phone calls were not returned to the researcher.

Fortunately, four institutions agreed to participate. Upon agreeing to participate, the sitting president was asked to identify a governing board member, a senior or executive level administrative officer, and a faculty member to approach regarding participation in the study. The researcher then contacted the recommended governing board member, senior or executive level administrative officer, and faculty member via letter.

Table 1 shows a comparative look at the four institutions which agreed to participate in this study.

**Table 1.**

**Summary of Research Universities in the Sample**

	Case I	Case II	Case III	Case IV
Student Enrollment	45,000	45,000	17,000	21,000
Instructional Faculty	1,400	1,400	1,000	1,300
Professional Programs	Law Vet Medicine Medical School Education Engineering	Law Vet Medicine Medical School Education Engineering	Vet Medicine	Law Medicine
Single or Multiple Campuses	Multiple	Multiple	Single	Single
Research Partnerships	Federal Energy	Federal Energy	Federal-NASA	Regional-various
Extension Services	Agriculture Public Service Institute	Agriculture Public Service Institute	Agriculture	Agriculture Public Policy

Sources of Data

This study employed three methods to collect data related to presidential derailments at the four institutions. These three sources were in-depth interviews, field notes, and document analysis.

The primary source of data collection involved in-depth interviews with each of the participants. Since interviews involve phrases, these phrases were assembled, clustered, broken into semiotic segments. They were organized to contrast, evaluate, analyze, and confer pattern upon them (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

One-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the participants at each campus. In addition to these initial interview participants, the researcher utilized the concept of chaining when any of those initially interviewed indicated that there might be others having intimate knowledge of the derailment. Chaining was used to help the researcher find others who might have useful information or insight into the particular derailment situation being studied. Although each case study began with a list of four participants, that list often grew as other names are added during the course of the interviews (Mertens, 1998).

The interview questions utilized were open-ended. Interviews are an effective method of collecting research data, as it allows the researcher to examine behaviors that were not observed in person (Patton, 2002). Open-ended interview questions allow the participant to take “whatever direction and use whatever words they want to express what they have to say” (Patton, 2002, p. 354). This method of data collection was useful for the study of the derailment phenomenon, as each participant within a specific case study had different recollections and thoughts about the derailment.

The questions for the interview were derived from Leslie and Van Velsor’s (1996) Success and Derailment Interview Questions. The interview protocol is attached as Appendix A.

The following three general questions were asked to initiate the interview:

- 1) What factors did you perceive as contributing to the departure of the derailed president?
- 2) What events may have occurred that contributed to or influenced the departure of the past president?

- 3) Is there anything else related to the departure of the president that you would like to tell me?

Subsequent probes and questions followed based upon the response to the questions. The in-depth interview lasted approximately one hour. The use of the interview protocol ensured that each person interviewed was asked the same set of questions in the same manner (Patton, 2002).

Field notes were another form of data collection. During the course of each interview, detailed notes were taken to address items that would not be picked up on the audio tape. Nonverbal messages such as pauses in speech, body language, and gestures were carefully recorded. Other observations were noted, as well, such as how the interview setting might influence the session and physical reactions to the interview questions. Skilled interviewers are advised to be sensitive to the unspoken messages that occur during one-on-one interviews, as the nonverbal notes can add rich, telling data to the research (Patton, 2002).

Each derailment situation was also investigated through a series of extensive document reviews. The researcher consulted various document sources: including trustee and board meeting minutes, local newspaper stories, and articles from higher education publications such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the *American Journal of Education*. This data was collected prior to the interviews conducted on each campus to provide a contextual frame for the derailment situation at the site. Table 2 shows a document summary utilized for the research project.

**Table 2.**

**Summary of Documents Reviewed**

	Case I	Case II	Case III	Case IV
Documents				
University Catalogs	+	+	+	+
University Web Sites	+	+	+	+
University Internal Documents (e.g., memoranda)			+	+
Board Minutes	+	+	+	+
Local Newspapers	+	+	+	+
State / Regional Newspapers	+	+	+	+
National Newspapers	+	+	+	+

*Note.* + indicates documents used; a blank space indicates documents not available

Data Collection Procedures

Approval for this study was obtained from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the start of the data collection. This approval form is attached as Appendix C. Informed Consent Forms (Appendix D) for each of the interviewees were constructed in accordance with accepted IRB guidelines and were distributed for signing by each interview participant prior to the interview process.

Participants were assured that their participation would remain anonymous during the entirety of the study, and that the names and institutions used in the study would be masked. Participants were assured that all information and data collected would be kept

securely by the researcher. Only the researcher and his faculty advisor would have access to the interview data.

Initial contact was initiated from the purposeful sample of ten universities via letter to invite the current president to participate in the study. The letters described the purpose of the study, illustrated what was known about derailment in the executive sector, and informed the president that they would receive a follow-up phone call that addressed the following: Scheduling an interview, recommendations for participants including a senior executive or administrative official that worked for the derailed president, a governing board member that was a member of the board during the derailed president's tenure, and a faculty member. The letter and the follow-up phone call served to build rapport between the president and the researcher. Patton (2002) suggests that a "sense of identification and connection can be a natural and logical consequence of having established relationship of rapport, trust, and mutuality" (p. 318).

Upon gaining the approval and recommendations from the current president at each selected institution, the researcher contacted via letter one of the senior executive officers, a member of the governing board, and a faculty member to explain the purpose of the study, issue an invitation to participate, and inform them that a follow-up phone call would be placed to answer questions and to attempt to schedule an interview.

Every attempt was made to perform each interview in person. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of both the study participants and the institutions involved. To ensure enough time to complete all of the interviews, interviews were conducted between August 2007 and February 2009.

The interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and verbatim transcripts were developed upon the completion of all the interviews. The transcripts of the interviews were sent to each participant in an effort to member check the interview process. Member checking allowed each participant to have the opportunity to clarify statements or viewpoints (Mertens, 1998).

The ideal method for collecting interview data was through face-to-face interaction. In the case that an in-person interview could not be secured, telephone interviews were utilized. Telephone interviews had some advantages, as respondents were more relaxed in speaking over the phone. Telephone interviews are also generally viewed as less intrusive by the participants (McClelland, 1994). In the event that the telephone interview method was used, the Informed Consent form was sent to the participant prior to the interview session.

#### Data Analysis

An inductive data analysis process was used in analyzing the data for this study. This process allowed for a complete investigation of the themes or patterns derived from the data (Patton, 2002). The data were initially analyzed first by institution. After this analysis, the data were compared across all four case studies.

The themes were reviewed and compared among the participants (current president, senior executive officer or administrator, board member, and faculty member). Once the data were compiled and organized, the themes were compared against the four themes from Leslie and Van Velsor's (1996) research.

The data was searched for common and distinctive themes. The interview data were coded and analyzed in a series of steps. Step one involved open coding. This phase

involved breaking down the data into discrete parts and giving each small incident a name or label. Step two involved axial coding, which took the identified labels and compares them within the categories. Axial coding allowed the researcher to compare relationships between the categories. Step three involved selective coding, which took one primary, core category (theme) and showed the relationship of the other categories to it (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

#### Trustworthiness of the Data

The trustworthiness of the data was improved through the use of triangulation. Triangulation involves checking information through the use of multiple sources (Mertens, 1998). This study utilized interviews, field notes, and document reviews to collect data about the derailment phenomenon, allowing for triangulating the data (Patton, 2002). “Either consistency in overall patterns of data from different sources or reasonable explanations for differences in data from divergent sources can contribute significantly to the overall credibility of findings” (Patton, 2002, p. 560).

A pilot interview was conducted to test the interview questions and tactics, thus enhancing the trustworthiness of the interview questions for gaining the information sought. This interview was conducted on a retired chancellor of a regional public university. This person immediately followed a derailed chancellor in the 2000-01 academic year. The pilot test afforded the researcher an opportunity to practice the interview process, and it allowed the participant to give initial feedback on the interview protocol (Mertens, 1998).

The study was also enhanced through the use of an independent reader of the interview data. The independent reader was used to assist with the interview protocol and

to read for themes in the interview transcripts. This individual, who was well-versed in qualitative research, contributed to the validity of any themes that arose from the initial data analysis process.

Finally, member checking was used after the interview process. Each research participant had the opportunity to review the transcript from the one-on-one interview. Member checking allowed the participant to have an opportunity to clarify statements or viewpoints (Mertens, 1998).

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors associated with presidential derailments in a public research university setting.

The research questions guiding the study were:

- 1) What are the factors associated with presidential derailment?
- 2) What precipitating events led to the derailment of the president?
- 3) What relationship, if any, may be found between derailment factors emerging from previous Center for Creative Leadership research and factors emerging from this study?

Four public research educational institutions served as the data collection sites. From those four institutions, 21 interviews were completed. These 21 interviews were collected from 19 different individuals, as 2 of the participants worked with multiple derailments and were willing to discuss each one. In addition, a sitting president at a fifth public research institution was interviewed. Unfortunately, no other interviews could be obtained from that fifth university. This additional interview provided context for the study of derailment in public research universities, but no data from the fifth institution was included in the final analysis. It did, however, confirm the results.

Using interviews, field notes and the analysis of related documents and public records, an abundance of data was collected for this study.

## Results

### Case Study 1 — University A

#### The University Environment

University A is a multi-campus, public university system that offers over 300 degree programs. It has an enrollment of over 45,000 students across its campuses.

University A has nationally recognized professional programs in law, veterinary medicine, education and engineering. The university also has a medical campus and an agricultural component that extends into each county across the state.

University A has a research partnership with a federal energy agency. University A also operates an extended public service agency that offers services and programs to every city and county governmental entity in the state.

#### Derailment Themes

For this case study, the president that immediately followed the derailed president, the current university president, a retired administrative cabinet member, a senior administrator that served on the cabinet of the derailed president, and a tenured faculty member who worked on campus during the time of the derailment were interviewed. A member of the board of trustees who also served as the president of the alumni association during the time of the derailment was also interviewed.

Chaining was utilized in the case study as the president who immediately followed the derailed president suggested the name of the senior cabinet member. Analysis of the interviews, field notes and a document search revealed four themes that contributed to the derailment of the president at University A.

*Problems with Interpersonal Relationships.* Derailment theme 1 involves a problem with interpersonal relationships with others at the institution. The derailed president was seen as aloof and distant. A senior administrator said, “. . . he attempted to have somewhat of an imperial presence, anointed to lead, etc.” That administrator later added that “they (the public) just tuned him out. Coverage (of the derailment) went on and he was closed out in a (building name omitted) negotiation. Terminated. Irreplaceably damaged.”

This president also had difficulty developing relationships with other constituencies closely related to the university. The trustee stated

The (higher education) executive has to do their very best to be genially engaged with the stake holders, board members, trustees, etc. In (state name omitted), it's the legislators. I think they (the legislature) see themselves as board members of sorts in all things pertaining to state government. If the executive of the state's premier research University gets all of a sudden crossways with members of the state's general assembly, that's not going to bode well. When the public spotlight begins to be directed at the actions of the executive, that person needs to be very diligent and prompt in trying to make things right with the stakeholders and anything that has been called to the public's attention.

A faculty member added, “He had an agenda for what he wanted to do at (University A), but his arrogance kept him from being effective.” This president was seen as not having “a good gauge on the current environment at the University.” The president also appeared to have a sense of entitlement to university resources, which isolated him from the university community. “He spent a lot of money in a very short time and (University A) has deep pockets. You know that. It was not the money — it was that those things were complete tokens of his complete arrogance and not even his ability

to fake being humble, which he could do — by the way.” This same participant later added that “he wanted to be a big shot. And he was — briefly.”

A national newspaper report supported this theme in a quote by the state’s governor on the president’s struggling public image barely a year into the president’s tenure. The governor suggested that the president needed to be more open and cooperative with institutional stakeholders to avoid any future accusations of impropriety.

A retired member of the derailed president’s cabinet supported these claims, stating that the president had a “narcassistic” personality. “When the president walked into a room, he not only wanted everyone to notice him, he expected it.”

*Poor Selection of Personal Advisors.* Derailment theme 2 relates to poor selection of advisors. The derailed president at University A was perceived to have selected unqualified people to assist in carrying out his plan. A faculty participant talked of “a couple of bad judgments on the personnel side.” The faculty member later added that these advisors did not do a good job of educating the president. “Some of the changes he wanted were necessary, but he did not understand the various constituencies that he was working with at University A. He needed to take more time to educate the (board) on his priorities before beginning to move forward.” The faculty member did not feel that the president was given good advice by those closest to him.

A retired member of the derailed president’s cabinet stated that the president had inherited a couple of advisors as a result of the search process. He commented that these advisors were brought in to simply fill vacant spots in the administration, and that these people seemed to have many political connections with the state government. This administer believed that these people might not have been hired otherwise.

A senior administrator added that the derailed president believed that “nobody would be able to stand up to him because he had the board and a powerful board member, the governor backing him, and because he had on his staff the person who had been hand-picked by the governor to find him, who was (name withheld).” This participant also asserted that “he was getting bad advice from people around him who didn’t understand the academy, (name withheld), and the guy. They didn’t know what the (expletive deleted) they were doing so they couldn’t give him good advice.” A faculty member added that “his mistakes seemed to be so ill-informed and stupid.”

Board minutes from the university relate the president’s nomination of a close, personal advisor of the state’s governor to be his executive vice president. The board of trustees approved the nomination, and that person was hired. Several months later, a national higher education journal reported that this advisor had given the president the interview questions he would be asked prior to the official interview.

*Flawed Search Process.* Derailment theme 3 relates to flaws in the presidential search process. Numerous comments were made about the search process that identified and selected the derailed president, including, “He had a sense of entitlement to university resources. The board had never dealt with situations like this, and perhaps the university should have been better prepared.”

A senior cabinet member talked about the lay board that selected the president:

When you have a lay board, whether it’s the (University A), a church board, or anything like that, and you get 10,12, or 20 — any number of people doing the things that those folks do — if you get one person on the board who has real fire in his or her belly about a particular topic and is willing to spend his or her time and money and effort making whatever is they want to happen . . . if the other board members let that person have their way, and most of the time they do, then the institution has lost their ‘lay-boardness.’ They have turned themselves over to one

committed person. And that may be a good person and a good commitment but it is not the way boards are supposed to work.

Another participant added that “(University A) failed him and failed itself by selecting him and for whatever reason (failed him) through the search and orientation processes (in) informing him of the environment he was going to land in.”

The local newspaper ran an article that referred to the search situation as a classic example of “*Murphy’s Law*.” This president had been hired on the heels of another presidential derailment at the university, and the article described how the search committee believed that the prior derailment had just been bad luck. The article further stated that the derailed president’s search process had been conducted in haste to try and quickly remove the “bad taste” left in the mouths of the general public.

A national newspaper ran two scathing articles about the university’s search process. The first article focused on accusations made by an individual who claimed to have first-hand knowledge that the president had been given his interview questions (for the search) in advance. This person also claimed that the president had met with several key state government leaders and members of the board of trustees prior to the official interview. The president later denied these claims.

The other article focused on the fact that state law required the university’s board of trustees to select the president. The writer claimed that the state’s governor, who by virtue of his position effectively ran the board, created a search committee composed of himself, and several handpicked representatives. While the article chided the search committee’s poor job in running the search, it also placed blame on the rest of the board of trustees, although acknowledging that it is difficult to deny the governor’s requests.

Board minutes obtained from the university described the process as nationwide and competitive. The minutes also reflect the effectiveness of hiring a search firm, which had helped attract over 100 candidates for the job, and contained high praise for the state's governor for his work to ensure an open search process.

*Unethical Behavior.* Derailment theme 4 relates to a breach of ethics. A faculty member who was interviewed said that the local newspaper had:

. . . put him under scrutiny he was not prepared for — credit card bills and all kinds of maneuvers around some of (University A's) soft policies that have existed for some time. There are many prohibitions and guidelines to work around, but some of them can be massaged slightly at the edges. However, much attention was focused on his maneuvering on the edges and that brought him down.

One of the derailed president's senior advisors simply stated that he "was a crook." It is worth noting that this participant shouted at this point in the interview. The advisor added, "He thought he was so smart and so much smarter than everyone else around him and that they'd never catch up to anything that he was doing." The president who followed the derailed president believed that the leader had misled the search team because he was undergoing a change in marital status, but did not inform anyone. This participant stated, "he did not bring his wife with him, which ended up being an issue. He should have discussed this — a change in family situation — with the Board of Trustees."

A board of trustees member added:

Questions have been raised about credit card bills not being paid on a monthly basis or a timely basis. There were other events just from a PR standpoint that were really bad. The extravagant spending, niceties like the gas grill — \$7,000 gas grill at the executive residence. Also our state, even though we are in a far more serious climate now, but even back then the people were becoming very critical of any extravagance.

The board of trustee member added that “the overriding factor (for the derailment) was the perception of fiscal mismanagement occurring.” Later in the interview, the trustee stated:

There was also at that time an idea floated by (name omitted) about the acquisition of a new airplane on behalf of the university. Upon opening that discussion it caused a great deal of discussion being placed on the misuse of the current airplane the university had at that time. That closer examination led to the discovery of other things such as ‘inappropriate use of university resources.’ I recall he made a number of trips to (city omitted) where the (conference) headquarters are located. Investigation suggested that some of the trips were to visit a girlfriend of sorts and not on official business of the (conference) office.

A large, daily newspaper in the region described the derailed president’s spending habits as “sick.” The article ran a detailed list of unnecessary expenses made by the derailed leader during his tenure at the university, and summarized the situation by stating that the president had more in common with a dishonest corporate CEO than he did with the academy. In an interview, a retired member of his cabinet added that “he didn’t want to keep receipts...he just wanted to spend money.”

The current president stated:

He was corrupt. He used facilities, personnel, for his own personal use. The real issue here is that there is this regal sense that people get. A national higher educational journal reported that the derailed president had come under scrutiny from the state’s governor for awarding several no-bid contracts to personal friends and acquaintances.

This claim was also reported in a daily newspaper in the city of another institution where the president formerly worked. This article also described several gifts — some involving large amounts of cash — that the president had taken from corporations and organizations during his time as president at the local university.

The minutes from the board meeting immediately following the president's resignation reflect much discussion on the monetary decisions that were made by the president. The document also describes future policies that would include more frequent audits of expenditures, well-defined policies for presidential entertainment expenses, and the need for a more direct line of communication between the auditors/fiscal officers of the university and the board of trustees.

#### Summary of Derailment Themes for University A

The derailment that occurred at University A happened for a variety of reasons, but four major themes were revealed. First, the derailed president was unable to maintain positive relationships with others. He was viewed as aloof, arrogant, and distant. Next, the president apparently made poor choices in selecting his top advisors. These advisors provided poor advice on how to successfully navigate the landscape of the university and provided poor information concerning the needs and traditions of the various constituencies.

University A also employed a flawed process for selecting the president, and the institution was ill prepared for dealing with problems with this official when the derailment began. Finally, the derailed president was also viewed as an individual who did not make ethical decisions — either professionally or personally. These four themes all contributed to the untimely departure of the president at University A.

## Case Study 2 — University B

### The University Environment

University B is a public, land grant university with an enrollment of over 46,000 students and contains over 1,400 instructional faculty members. University B is part of a multi-campus university system.

University B has a research partnership with a local governmental power entity and public service program that extends into every county in the state.

### Derailment Themes

For this case study, the president that immediately preceded the derailed president, the current president, a senior administrator that served on the cabinet of the derailed president, an alumnus who served as the president of the national alumni board and was also a board of governors member, a retired member of the derailed president's cabinet, a board of trustees member and a tenured faculty member who worked on campus during the time of the derailment were interviewed.

Chaining allowed for interviewing a trustee and a senior recommended by the president that preceded the derailed president. Analysis of the data revealed five themes that contributed to the derailment of the president at University B.

*Problems with Interpersonal Relationships.* Derailment theme 1 at University B concerned a problem with interpersonal relationships. The derailed president was viewed as unapproachable. Numerous comments from interview participants pointed to the president as distant from those around him:

The point was that when you are at the top you are carrying a big sword in that you are perceived as having all the power. Therefore, people are afraid to tell you something that they think you don't want to hear. And I

saw some of that going on with (name omitted). We all went though it and, in one way, we wanted to tell him, ‘Stop it. You don’t know how this is being perceived.’ And in another way, I don’t think that we can tell him. He’s the boss. He can fire us. The nature of being at the top can isolate you in some ways and if you are lucky — you’ve got a couple of people in whom you confide and, by the same token, those (people) are allowed to tell you things that you need to do. And I think a lot of presidents —and it’s the nature of the beast — don’t have that going on.

This derailed president also perceived to be aloof, and he instilled a sense of fear among his staff that contributed to this theme. The president that preceded the derailed president stated that “(his) approach to things was to go off in a corner and if you wanted to see him, you went over to him.” A senior member of his cabinet observed, “For whatever reason, we picked a guy who is very, very smart and basically couldn’t talk to anybody.” The prior president supported this theme stating, “After he had been here a short time, he told his staff, ‘If any of you mention (the names of former presidents) in my presence I’ll fire you.’” At this point in the interview, this participant seemed to become very agitated and angry, waving his arms in the air to emphasize his point.

One comment by a member of his cabinet was particularly revealing:

I thought back on three or four instances where you could push his button and he could get furious. There were senior staff people in a meeting with him and he was fair-skinned and you could see it start in his neck and go up and there were a few times when I physically intervened and said, ‘Stop this meeting now.’ He was having an ongoing battle with (name omitted) about (subject omitted) and he would send me emails at 3 a.m. Horrible emails and they continued back and forth. I went to him one day and told him he needed to meet with (name omitted), that you’ve got to quit this horrible emailing back and forth. And he said, ‘I’ll do it if you will sit in the room with me.’ And I did. So yes, I did have a different kind of relationship with him. I took him through; I really think that’s what it was.

This participant later commented that “we had this person that nobody knew how to deal with.”

A retired cabinet member commented that he had witnessed the president's blatant disregard of the university's traditions and the people that had preceded him in university leadership. This participant stated that "even if you have your own values, don't demean those who preceded you."

The alumnus commented that he was in a meeting with the derailed president where he and two other alumni leaders were petitioning their case for the future structure of the alumni association. The president had his own ideas of how it should be structured, so when the alumni leaders presented their case he became "enraged." This anger caused him to ignore these alumni leaders in future endeavors. The alumnus went on to state that it was clear that:

he didn't value (the) alumni (leadership) and did not want any input from us (the alumni association or board of governors). As time went on, and events went on, he had no one to stand behind him, and no one would listen to him.

A retired member of his cabinet remarked that the president "wasn't somebody that you could have a conversation with if you want to go down a different path (direction). He didn't like you to disagree (with him)."

Finally, senior member of his staff stated that there was "a degree of paranoia about the man."

*Poor Selection of Personal Advisors.* Derailment theme 2 related to the president's poor selection of advisors. A faculty member spoke frequently about this theme, citing that the president made "an unwise personnel decision" and then engaged in "unwise behavior" relating to the person he hired. A common interview thread that developed involved the qualifications of some of his close advisors. An administrator spoke of a degree of "nepotism" in his decisions. The failed president also caused

division among his advisors with his hiring practices, with one participant acknowledging:

Everyone was shocked when he hired (name omitted), but (the recommender) and everyone at (the previous campus that had employed the person in question) wanted (the person in question) gone. (This person) was creating havoc down there.”

One final comment from that participant was that “somebody after a while — trustees, chancellors — somebody has to be concerned as to his judgment in (hiring).”

The derailed president’s hiring practices contributed to this perception as well. One participant cited that a particular hire “created quite a stir” among certain legislators, university administrators, and trustees, and caused damage to various relationships. Additionally, the participant observed that once (a certain series of bad decisions) had come to pass, “the trustees had no choice. He had to be gone.” This participant believed that the derailed president lost any support he may have once had, stating, “If you allow a person to color the water internally and externally, my feeling is that you won’t survive for very long.”

The local newspaper supported this theme in several articles, reporting that a member of the university administrative staff had been hired and promoted under the president’s watch using a questionable search process. The university subsequently launched an investigation and the local newspaper later reported that this employee’s resume had been grossly falsified. A national newspaper later reported that this employee resigned under pressure. Later the same year, another prominent national newspaper reported that the university had concluded her resume had been falsified.

An article from a local television's web site revealed that a university attorney demanded an explanation from the terminated president on a total of three hires, including the individual with an allegedly falsified resume. This request eventually made its way into the local legal system via a lawsuit.

*Unethical Behavior.* Derailment theme 3 at University B involved a perception of a lack of professional and personal ethics. The president that preceded the derailed president described the president's behavior as "sordid." This individual described the president's untimely departure as resulting from of a lack of personal ethics, citing an improper relationship with an employee.

The current president added that "I think that there was one primary factor and that was personal misbehavior. It was widely known that there was an in-office relationship that was inappropriate and ultimately corrupt. It was manipulative..." The president went on to add:

There were great failings on how that (situation) came to be. The basic one was personal integrity, and at a certain point you have to have that. There is no way that you can do this job if you don't have personal integrity. That's the underlying cause for all of these (derailments at the institution).

The board of trustee member interviewed stated that the derailed president simply "gave in to things that he shouldn't have." She went on to say that "he was not as strong (of a leader) as we had hoped he would be."

Numerous headline newspaper stories ran over the course of three months across the state, including two that chronicled the release of over 900 pages of email transcripts exchanged between the derailed president and a university employee. These messages included comments about the nature of their relationship. Several email messages

included professions of love (by the subordinate towards the president) and talks of weekend meetings.

A national newspaper ran a series of articles over a period of three months, with each article referencing the alleged inappropriate nature of the relationship. One article spoke of the subordinate's emails to other university personnel in which she professed her love for the president and made numerous references to their relationship. Another news article was published in two of the state's largest newspapers detailed the content of numerous emails that were sexual in nature.

The alumni president and board of governors member stated that it was commonly known that there was a special relationship between the employee and the derailed president, citing knowledge of a late evening, closed-door meeting.

A cabinet member supported this theme. "When we finally got our courage up (to approach him), we were too far down the road and we couldn't stop it." A faculty member added, "He didn't pay attention (to his advisors' admonishments about his relationship). Nothing changed." This relationship was also described as "unwise behavior." The faculty member commented that the president's downfall was the result of "an inappropriate relationship and the disclosure of that relationship with (name)."

*Failure to Change or Adapt During the Presidential Transition.* Another derailment theme that emerged during the course of the interviews involved an inability to change or adapt during the presidential transition. The alumni leader stated that he was:

...a puppet whose strings are being pulled. He was brought in to do a job and change the university...ultimately I think he would have peeled off (campus names omitted). I think that the person behind this was (name

omitted). He just cared about (the land-grant campus). I'm supportive of the current system because it is critical for state-wide support...the university is still paying the price for him re-arranging the furniture of the university, which he did. He really weakened the university...if we had (totally) split off as he intended to do we would have been weak in the legislature. You lose legislative support. A vote is a vote, whether it is from (any area where the campuses are located).

One long-time administrator commented that this derailed president hurt his legacy because he “reorganized the university in a very dumb way” — a way that was a radical departure from the traditional organizational structure. This was conducted without much forethought and preparation according to this participant.

The board of trustee member mentioned that the reorganization led to a sense of uneasiness across the university system. “There were lots of changes, and (he) tried to change the system. That- I think- scared lots of people.” She went on to state that his quick decisions relating to change brought a feeling of dread in some of the smaller schools in the university system, stating that “ I think that scared lots of people...that (a particular regional institution) would be dropped off the face of the earth.” She ended our interview by stating that “you need to change with the times, but you need to think about what you do.”

The alumni leader stated that the president made waves across the university and the general assembly for wanting to reorganize the university's athletic program. This sentiment was confirmed by a retired member of the president's cabinet.

Another participant observed:

The third factor may have been that from the ‘git-go.’ there wasn't a good fit between his skills and what this university needed. This is a big, far-reaching institution that is far-reaching and relies heavily on alumni and donor support — big time — and we don't have the cash of a Harvard to

rely on. It takes people skills and political skills that I don't think he ever had either.

This participant later added:

Only to reinforce that if you are a student of leadership you know that there is never really a boss. Bosses have other bosses. The perception is that the president is the leader and if that person — if tragedy befalls that person — it harms the whole place because the perception is rotten at the top. I think that's important to remember.

Another participant added, "One lesson we learned is that he was not in a strong position because of his efforts to change the structure of the (university) system, specifically the roles of the (flagship) campus and the system."

*Flawed Selection Process.* The final derailment theme relates to flaws in the presidential search process. Board of trustee minutes revealed that the university contracted the services of a national search firm to help them identify potential candidates. The minutes mentioned that the state's laws concerning open records of such state business would prevent the university from approaching certain candidates without the process being made public. The minutes went on to state that the search firm could talk to potential candidates that the search committee could not. Much concern was raised about the university's ability to attract sitting presidents to become candidates for the job, as the sitting executive might be hesitant to allow his or her name to be made public as part of a process for a different job.

Another set of minutes from a board meeting noted that there was a large list of potential candidates, but the search committee and the professional search firm had eliminated anyone from consideration that had not been in their position at least three

years or who had not demonstrated leadership ability in their current job. This process had narrowed the candidate pool to approximately twenty individuals.

These minutes also reveal that the search firm proposed four candidates for consideration by the search committee. The search committee eventually recommended the president who later derailed. At the time of the recommendation, the board described his strengths as including good decision-making skills and the ability to engage in strategic planning. This same set of minutes, however, contained a letter from an attorney who challenged the search committee's process, stating that the selected individual had been the inside candidate all along. This led the board to seek an opinion of the state's Attorney General, who determined that the search was conducted properly. These minutes reveal that the individual in question was selected to be the university's next president by unanimous vote of the board. After the resignation of the president, a national journal focused on higher education discussed a number of flawed searches conducted in recent years by the university.

After the derailment occurred, the minutes of the annual board meeting minutes describe a meeting filled with discussion regarding the university's search process for their new executive. The minutes show heavy involvement from the Governor's office, including a charge that this search must instill confidence in the external and internal campus constituencies.

The current president stated:

It's partly the search process. You have to use the right process. You have to do your research. If you can go to where these presidential candidates are and talk to the right people- get a feel for their personality and background. You can really find out what kind of person these candidates are. Send the right people in to do the digging...someone like

(name withheld). Board members and members of the search committee don't know what to ask about.

An alumni leader stated in an interview that “the pool was weak and we didn't get any outstanding candidates.” He later commented that the advisory committee (made up of alumni leaders, faculty, staff and students) did not recommend him for the job. He said that “I think (name omitted) was chosen to accept the order to do the deed in the university (to reorganize it).” Another related comment, presented by a board of trustee member, was that “when we selected him, we did some background checks and thought that he was the person for the job.” She later added that “it (the search) obviously didn't turn out the way that we had hoped.”

#### Summary of Derailment Themes for University B

The presidential derailment that occurred at University B happened for a variety of reasons that can be chronicled in the five themes derived from the data. First, the derailed president had a difficult time creating and maintaining good interpersonal relationships with others. He was viewed as distant, and as producing fear instead of cooperation in people at the university. Next, the derailed president made poor decisions in selecting several of his advisors. These advisors ultimately damaged his relationships within the internal and external university communities.

The derailed president was also viewed as having a lack of personal ethics. Additionally, the derailed president did not adapt or change during the transition to the office of president. Finally, the university utilized a process in selecting the president that was seen as being flawed. These five themes all contributed to the untimely departure of the president at University B.

## Case Study 3 — University C

### The University Environment

University C is a public, land grant university that offers approximately 175 programs leading to baccalaureate, masters, specialist, and doctoral degrees. It is the largest public university in the state, and it contains the state's only veterinary medicine program. The university has an enrollment of over 17,000 students and contains over 1,000 instructional faculty members.

University C has an active extension program that operates offices across the state. It has a tradition steeped in providing leadership and service to the agricultural community.

### Derailment Themes

For this case study, the president that immediately followed the derailed president, a senior administrator who served on the cabinet of the derailed president, a tenured faculty member who worked on campus during the time of the derailment, and a senior administrator who worked in the development office were interviewed.

Chaining led to interviewing a cabinet member recommended by the president. The cabinet member then recommended both a faculty member and a trustee (who did not wish to participate). The faculty member recommended the development officer as a participant. Analysis of the data revealed three primary themes that contributed to the derailment of the president at University C.

*Problems with Interpersonal Relationships.* Derailment theme 1 at University C concerned a problem with interpersonal relationships at the institution. The derailed

president was viewed as a person who did not relate well with faculty, staff, or alumni.

The president who replaced the derailed leader stated that:

There are several things I don't think he ever recognized. First, that there is a natural tension between faculty and administration. Unless it becomes worse than it usually is, it won't be destructive — but it's there. The faculty is suspicious of the administration and the administration wants to make sure they accommodate the faculty without letting them run the show. There is a natural tension that he never recognized. When the faculty senate criticized him, he couldn't let it run off like water off a duck's back. He would respond with a three or four page memo about 'how can you criticize me after all I have done for you' type of response. For example, they said 'Why have you not been coming to the faculty senate meetings?' Instead of saying 'I'm sorry. I've been terribly busy. I'll try to come more in the future,' he wrote them a four page memo about what he had been doing for them and how could they possibly question him.

The daily newspaper in the state's capital reported the derailed president exhibited a leadership style that compared to that of a dictator, and reported that this did not sit well with the campus community. The article went on to report that his leadership style isolated both students and faculty members.

An out-of-state daily newspaper located in the derailed president's home state mentioned that the institution's faculty members were upset about his lack of attendance at faculty meetings, prompting members of the faculty to question his interest in their work. This faculty sentiment was echoed in a national journal that focuses on higher education.

A member of his senior administration stated in the interview that he "didn't listen to top donors. Top donors would request an audience and he wouldn't comply." Another person commented that the president had a difficult time relating to various members of the campus community:

They (the events) were really a bit crazy. He kept people up in arms about the campus appearing a certain way. He was really interested in beautification. Some people (on campus) felt that he pushed this agenda too strongly. For example, he didn't like (department omitted) projects being done outside in public view. He thought that it looked bad. The faculty and students were upset about moving the projects back inside the building. Faculty complained that their academic freedom was being compromised. The students filed petitions and protested. The faculty members were behind the petitions, but the students signed them.

*Failure to Change or Adapt to the Presidential Transition.* Derailment theme 2 related to the president's inability to change or adapt during the transition to the presidency. One participant spoke frequently about this theme, citing that the president had recently made the transition from the military to higher education. This participant commented that the derailed president was a "life-long military person" who had trouble adjusting from a military career to working in an academic setting. "One of the main issues was his leadership style. It wasn't accepted on campus."

This theme was supported by an out-of-state daily newspaper located in the derailed president's home state, as it suggested that the president tried to operate in a top-town military style, which did not transfer well to the college campus.

The president who followed the derailed leader stated in an interview

Dr. (name omitted) was from the military. He was a . . . general, which means that he is a very intelligent individual, very capable. He was unable — in my opinion, to make the transition from the military leadership role to an academic leadership role. There is a great difference in the academy and in the military. There are many people who have made the transition from the military to the academic (realm). He was not able to do that.

One final comment from that participant was, "There was a failure to understand the difference in the academic and military environments. The failure to adjust your leadership style to those environments was the principle reason (for derailment)." The

faculty member interviewed stated, “The faculty, however, were unhappy with the amount of change he had caused in such a short amount of time.”.

A daily newspaper from the home state of the derailed president reported that the president did not act “presidential” in carrying out his daily duties, and that his unconventional approach to his job seemed like a grab for attention. While some found this refreshing, others thought the activities were ego-driven.

*Flawed Selection Process.* Derailment theme 3 related to flaws in the presidential search process. This president was hired on the recommendation of the state’s college board, which oversees the activities of the state’s public colleges. Several comments were made about this and the search process. “He came in under a cloud in that the board of trustees had a secret search process.” Another interviewee discussed this in greater detail

They didn’t reveal the names of the candidates until the end of the search process ...therefore the faculty was critical of the process and there was some compromise — and there were some people on the campus that some alumni supported. This was not his (the derailed president) fault at all. He just came in under some suspicious circumstances. This was a disadvantage that was not of his creation.

An out-of-town daily newspaper from the derailed president’s home state also mentioned that the search was a closed-door process. The article also quoted a member of the faculty who said that the college was involved too late into the process.

Another article from an online newspaper that represented a series of regional print newspapers reported that the board believed that the search had to be somewhat private to protect the candidates from too much exposure, as some of the candidates had existing jobs and did not want to be identified. The article reported that four finalists emerged, but none of them had unanimous support from the board. The derailed president

emerged out of that group almost by surprise, as his name had not appeared on the list with the original four finalists. A second article from the same online newspaper quoted a member of the board as saying that private consultation with individuals involved with the presidential search is the only way to attract the best candidates.

It is worth noting that the board minutes from the trustee meetings do not detail events involving the search for the derailed president, as they reflect the members' decision to go into executive, private, session each time the topic was discussed. As the university moved toward the selection of a new president, an online newspaper from the region reported that the university was seeking more input in the process from the greater campus community. An advisory committee comprised of faculty, staff, graduates and community leaders was formed to provide feedback on the process, and to recommend names to the board for consideration. Additionally, the board pledged to hire someone from the candidate list approved by the advisory committee.

Board minutes from a trustee meeting a few months later supported the claim as the search committee reported reviewing candidate recommendations from the advisory committee. Details of the discussion were not revealed, however, as the search committee voted to move into an executive, closed session.

#### Summary of Derailment Themes for University C

The presidential problems that occurred at University C revolved around three key themes. First, the derailed president had difficulty creating and maintaining good interpersonal relationships with others. He did not relate well to students, faculty, staff, or alumni, nor did he listen to their input. The derailed president often reacted harshly to

criticism, further creating a divide between the president's office and the various campus constituencies.

Second, the derailed president did not manage change, particularly in adapting to the culture of the institution. This leader made a dramatic career change, leaving the military for a presidency at a higher education institution. None of the participants felt there was a smooth transition between careers. The participants perceived that the president simply could not adapt to the campus culture. University C also was perceived to have conducted a flawed process for selecting the president, as the search was shrouded in secrecy. These three themes contributed to the untimely departure of the president at University C.

#### Case Study 4 – University D

##### The University Environment

University D is a public, land grant university system that offers over 180 degree programs, including degrees at the baccalaureate, masters and doctoral levels. The university has an enrollment of over 21,000 students on campus. Located in a rural area, University D offers professional programs in law and medicine.

##### Derailment Themes

A senior administrator who served on the cabinet of the derailed president, a faculty member, a senior member of the development staff, and a tenured faculty member who was at one time chancellor of this campus were interviewed. Chaining resulted in the addition of a member of the development staff, as two initial participants mentioned that I needed to speak with the development professional. Interviews with several other members of the campus community, including the current chancellor and trustees, were

secured but had to be excluded from the study. A lawsuit filed by the derailed chancellor led to their withdrawal of permission to use their interviews in this study.

Unfortunately, change is a constant at this university. In an article in the local newspaper, a faculty member mentioned that this situation involved the eighth chancellor in the faculty member's seventeen years at the university. Analysis of the data revealed three primary themes that contributed to the latest derailment of the chancellor at University D.

*Failure to Change or Adapt to the Presidential Transition.* The first derailment theme dealt with the inability to change or adapt during the transition to the chancellor's position. Three participants did not believe that the derailed president was equipped to deal with the challenges of the new role. A senior administrator stated, "Early on it was clear that he did not understand or handle the expectations of the office." This interviewee went on to add that the derailed executive was simply "not prepared for the job."

The former chancellor added that the leadership culture of the university system made it hard for anyone to adjust to the chancellor's role. He stated that:

There has been a leadership culture on this campus that has been bottom up rather than top down. Some of the leadership likes that. You don't have to make many decisions. You set up committees that meet and whatever falls out of that process is your decision. You rarely have to make a hard decision. This leadership style may have been tough for him.

Another administrator stated that the derailed chancellor "jumped from a deanship at (a small institution) to chancellor. Nice guy...but a huge jump from 1,500 students to a campus of 21,000."

Another problem related to the chancellor's inability to work in a union environment as illustrated in the following comment:

This chancellor came from a non-union environment. He came here where there are about 17 collective bargaining units that reported to him and that is a different kind of leadership and management environment than what you'd find in an open shop. I think that most people are not prepared for that. I've had trouble making that transition myself. That is a very difficult transition to make . . . a university environment where almost everybody is represented. Primarily the only ones on our campus who are not represented are high-level administrators and high academic chairs. Ninety percent of this campus is represented by a union. That was a challenge as well.

The university system president was quoted in a local newspaper as saying that the chancellor had not fulfilled the basic duties of the position. Another article from a nationally-syndicated newspaper affirmed this, citing concerns about the chancellor's job performance.

*Problems with Interpersonal Relationships.* The second derailment theme dealt with a problem in developing sound interpersonal relationships. The former chancellor stated:

I'll also say that day-to-day communication between the chancellor and his boss is important and I don't know how well that was carried out. I have been challenged in this area in jobs myself before. My guess is that less than satisfactory communication was a problem.

A faculty member stated that the chancellor did not reach out to the community. He stated that the chancellor "was not involved in the community either in things like Kiwanis, etc. (He) did nothing to build community ties. We are small enough that these type of things get back to the (office)."

Another example involved a number of key events where he was a "no-show." The derailed president frequently could not be located when expected to be at an event. A

senior member of his cabinet reported that “the first football game after his arrival on campus, we traditionally hold a pre-game tailgate, and the chancellor was 45 minutes late, and his time was unaccounted for.” An administrator added that “he was absent quite a bit.”

Another administrator commented:

Ultimately, if you just look at the factors...and this is just a perception...that he was not performing. He didn't come in early, he didn't stay late. He was out of the office by 4:30 p.m. He cancelled meetings and appointments, or he wouldn't show up for meetings. We finally quit announcing that he was coming because he wouldn't show up.

A later comment from the same administrator was that “there were unexplained absences. He called in sick often. He might not cancel, but would ask to reschedule the meeting, which was often difficult to do.”

*Flawed Selection Process.* The third derailment theme dealt with a flawed search process. A press release from the university announcing the selection of the chancellor demonstrated the initial enthusiasm about the search process. A member of the board of trustees praised the inclusiveness of the search process. A faculty member stated that the search team fully supported the president's selection for chancellor. Unfortunately, the tenure for this chancellor was less than a year.

The former chancellor commented:

“The immediate tendency is that the search process itself wasn't properly done. Maybe the candidates weren't investigated as properly as they should have been. Nobody enters a marriage and expects it to last only a year. This was hard for everybody.

One of the campus administrators interviewed described the search process as follows:

Quirky . . . search process. I met all four candidates. It was an odd pool. One person was qualified, but wasn't offered the job. They were from

(institution withheld) and had an Ivy League education...brought a lot to the table but wasn't offered the job. When (name withheld) was named the chancellor, the president stated that 'I was not looking for a 'yes' man.' The lead story on television that evening quoted him on that . . . that he was not looking for a 'yes' man. I couldn't believe that he actually said that.

A faculty member commented that:

A lot of people in hindsight felt that he was not the strongest candidate and it was shocking when he was announced. There is a strong feeling that he was selected because of his (ethnic) background. It could bring something to the table when working with large urban areas. If this is true or not I don't know, but it has certainly been speculated. His leadership skills were certainly not as good as some of the other candidates. His notion of retention didn't pan out.

Another administrator simply stated, "He was not the best selection for the job . . .

I think that he was selected because he was considered not to be a threat to the system level president." Perhaps the statement that best summarized this theme at University D was that

I was really disappointed in how this worked out. It is so troubling to go through a search for a year and spend all this money and have the thing not even last a year. This was broken. The search process and the resulting hire were broken. We had two in a row like that that fell apart quickly . . . very short tenures. Something is not right with that.

Board minutes obtained from the institution do not reflect any public discussion of the derailment. The board of trustees went into a closed session for portions of the two meetings following the announcement of the chancellor's placement on administrative leave.

#### Summary of Derailment Themes for University D

The derailment problems at University D can be summarized in three distinct themes. First, the derailed chancellor had difficulty transitioning and adapting to the

rigors of the job and the institution. He was not prepared for the university climate, nor did he have a good understanding of what the job entailed.

The second theme related to the derailed chancellor’s inability to establish interpersonal relationships with others within the campus community. Communication with others, including the system president, was a problem along with his apparent reluctance to fully participate in university events.

The third derailment theme at University D was a flawed search process. This event was the second in a series of derailments at this institution. Problems with the search process were partially blamed for the derailments.

#### Cross-Case Analysis

Table 3 below provides an overview of the derailment themes that emerged from the data.

**Table 3.**

#### **Summary of Derailment Themes**

Case A	Case B	Case C	Case D
Theme 1: Problems with Interpersonal Relationships			
X	X	X	X
Theme 2: Poor Selection of Personal Advisors			
X	X		
Theme 3: Flawed Selection Process			
X	X	X	X
Theme 4: Unethical Behavior			
X	X		
Theme 5: Failure to Change or Adapt to the Presidential Transition			
	X	X	X

*Note.* x indicates theme observed; a blank indicates theme not observed

## Derailment Themes Across Cases

Five derailment themes were observed in the data collected. In order to address research question #1, the themes and the frequency with which they were observed are presented.

*Problems with Interpersonal Relationships.* The first derailment theme involved problems with interpersonal relationships. This included behavior that created friction or distance between a leader and their campus constituencies. Examples included fiery temperaments, aloofness, and a failure to be depended upon to participate in events. This theme was observed in all four case studies.

*Poor Selection of Personal Advisors.* The second derailment theme involved poor selection of personal advisors. This theme included either a lack of good judgment in the selection of trusted advisors or listening to advisors that were poorly informed about the operation of the institution. This theme was observed in two of the four cases.

*Flawed Selection Process.* The third derailment theme involved the perception of stakeholders that the presidential selection process was flawed. There was a perception that the universities did not employ the level of care required to select appropriate leaders, or that the search involved a secret process which resulted in a hand-picked appointment. This theme was observed in all four cases.

*Unethical Behavior.* The fourth derailment theme involved either proven or perceived unethical behavior on the part of the president. This breach of ethics was seen on both professional and personal levels, involving both financial mismanagement and questionable relationships with others. This theme was observed in two of the four cases.

*Failure to Change or Adapt to the Presidential Transition.* The fifth derailment involved the failure of the president to change or adapt during the transition to the office of the president. The case studies in which this theme was observed had leaders who ignored campus traditions, failed to gain the skills necessary to do a new job, and did not learn how to work with a new group of supervisors (either a governing board or a system governing presence). This theme was involved in three of the four cases.

#### Analysis of Events That Led to Presidential Derailments

In response to Research Question 2, the analysis of events leading to the derailment of each of the four presidents revealed no common events. In spite of commonalities in the reasons for derailment, and a relationship between those events and reasons for their derailment, each case had its own unique event or series of events that led to the point at which university constituencies began to question the leadership of the president.

In the first case, University A, one critical event led to the final dismissal of the president. The leader's travel was called into question, both in terms of expense and purpose. This incident led to many other accusations of misusing public funds. The accusations of fiscal irresponsibility fueled news stories across the country that damaged the presidency beyond repair.

In the second case, University B, two critical events precipitated the president's dismissal. One critical event was the discovery of an inappropriate personal relationship with a subordinate. The second event was the president's announcement of a very unpopular reorganization plan.

Various news outlets broadcast the anger expressed by the university constituencies pushing campus leaders to accommodate them by firing the president.

In the third case, University C, three critical events precipitated the final derailment: a very public, political dispute over funding; a controversial decision regarding a campus beautification project; and a public negative reaction to criticism from faculty and staff. Again, the widespread anger at these events combined to precipitate the president's dismissal.

In the fourth case, University D, one critical event precipitated the president's derailment, being 45 minutes late for an event with university donors. This was the first of a series of events at which the president was scheduled to appear, but never came or arrived extremely late.

#### Relationship Between Corporate Derailment Themes and University Derailment Themes

To answer Research Question 3 concerning possible relationships between the derailment themes between those found by Leslie and Van Velsor in the corporate environment and the derailment themes discovered in the present study, the themes are presented and compared in Table 4 below.

**Table 4**

**Comparison of Derailment Themes**

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Leslie and Van Velsor Corporate Themes	Public, Research University Themes
Problems with interpersonal relationships	Problems with interpersonal relationships
Failure to meet business objectives (lack of skills)	<i>Not observed</i>
Inability to build or lead a team	Poor selection of personal advisors (which led to inability to build and lead a team)
Inability to change or adapt during a transition	Inability to change or adapt during a transition
<i>Not observed</i>	Flawed selection process
<i>Not observed</i>	Unethical behavior

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Three derailment themes in the public, research universities investigated were observed to be directly related to the corporate themes reported by Leslie and Van Velsor. Perhaps the strongest comparison between the two sets of derailment themes can be found in the problems derailed leaders had with interpersonal relationships within their respective organizations. This theme was reported as greatly problematic in all four case studies.

Another strong relationship between the public, research university themes and corporate derailment themes could be seen in the inability of the president/chancellor to

adapt or change during a transition to the role of the president. This particular theme was observed in three case studies.

A third public, research university derailment theme that related to a corporate theme was the poor selection of personal advisors. This university theme resulted in the inability to build or lead a team theme described by Leslie and Van Velsor (1996). This theme was observed in two case studies.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS

The present study was an attempt to extend the leadership derailment literature, particularly the literature related to leadership in public research universities. Using the conceptual framework from Leslie and Van Velsor's (1996) study of leadership derailment in the corporate sector, this qualitative, multiple case study at four public research institutions sought to identify common derailment themes and events that led to presidential derailments, and to compare derailment themes in higher education and for-profit companies.

Within the framework of Leslie and Van Velsor's (1996) conceptual framework, results of 21 interviews, field notes, and a review of related documents were analyzed and grouped into themes. Once the themes from the collegiate case studies were compiled and organized, the themes were compared against the four themes from Leslie and Van Velsor's (1996) research.

This research was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the factors that led to the derailment of the public research university president?
2. What precipitating events led to the derailment of the president?
3. What relationship, if any, may be found between derailment factors emerging from previous Center for Creative Leadership research and factors emerging from this study?

## Summary of the Findings

In order to address the research question 1, an inductive data analysis process was used to analyze the interviews. Data were coded and analyzed by institution and then analyzed across cases. Five derailment themes emerged from the data collected. The themes and the frequency with which they were observed are as follows.

*Problems with Interpersonal Relationships.* The first derailment theme involved problems with interpersonal relationships. This theme included behavior that caused tension or conflict between a leader and the greater campus community. Examples included a bad temperament, detachment, and a perceived distance from the campus community. This theme was found in all four case studies.

*Poor Selection of Advisors (Inability to Build or Lead a Team).* The second derailment theme involved the poor selection of advisors. This theme included either a lack of good judgment in the selection of their close advisors or listening to advisors who were poorly informed about the operation of the institution. This theme was found in two of the four cases.

*Flawed Selection Process.* The third derailment theme involved a flawed selection process. This theme was found in all four cases.

*Unethical Behavior.* The fourth derailment theme involved unethical behavior on the part of the president, either observed or perceived. These behaviors were observed professionally and personally, and involved both financial mismanagement and questionable relationships with others. This theme was found in two of the four cases.

*Failure to Change or Adapt.* The fifth derailment theme involved the failure of the president to change or adapt to the new organization upon assuming the presidency.

The case studies in which this theme was observed had leaders who ignored campus traditions, failed to gain the skills necessary to do the new job, or did not learn how to work with a new group of supervisors (either a governing board or a system governing presence). This theme was found in three of the four cases. Table 3 presents a summary of these themes.

With respect to research question 2, data were analyzed from the interviews and the public documents related to the derailments. The specific events that precipitated each derailment were varied, but each critical event related to derailment themes discovered in the interview process.

In the first case study, the precipitating event was the fiscal irresponsibility of the president. Initially, attention was drawn to his use of the university airplane. This discovery drew attention to a list of purchases and expenditures in his home that drew public criticism. This event directly relates to the derailment theme of unethical behavior. In the second case study, one precipitating event was the discovery of an inappropriate personal relationship with a subordinate, which relates to problems with interpersonal relationships and unethical behavior. The second precipitating event was the president's announcement of a very unpopular reorganization plan, which related directly to his poor selection of personal advisors and failure to adapt to the culture of the organization.

In the third case study, there were three precipitating events that preceded the final derailment: a very public, political dispute over funding, a controversial decision regarding a campus beautification project, and a public negative reaction to criticism from faculty and staff. The first event relates directly to problems with interpersonal relationships and the second and third events exhibit a basic failure of the president to

adapt to the culture of the institution. In the fourth case study, critical events included several gatherings where the chancellor was scheduled to appear, but never came or arrived extremely late. These events directly tied to the derailment theme of having difficulty developing interpersonal relationships.

To answer research question 3, derailment themes found by Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) in the corporate sector were directly compared to derailment themes discovered in the present study in the public, research university environment. There were three derailment themes that were common to both the public, research university environment and the corporate environment. These three themes were problems with interpersonal relationships, the inability to build or lead a team, and the inability to change or adapt to during a transition.

Two derailment themes were unique to the public, research university environment. These two themes were a flawed search process and unethical behavior.

#### Discussion of the Findings

One would expect executive-level leaders of academic institutions to possess a healthy amount of interpersonal wisdom, but the research pointed to a lack of basic human relations skills that were necessary to effectively lead a public research university. It is interesting to note that these presidents who derailed lacked basic interpersonal intelligence and yet have still risen to executive positions.

A flawed search process was found to be a factor in each of the cases of presidential derailment studied. Institutions of higher education are heavily dependent upon the use of search firms and consulting groups to develop their pool of prospective presidential candidates. The findings of the present study suggest that the searches

conducted by these firms were not comprehensive enough to identify legitimate candidates for the top leadership position within the university. If the search process is flawed, then a less than adequate candidate pool will more than likely emerge.

Another point of discussion is the inability of presidents to adapt to the job or the culture of the university environment as demonstrated in three of the four cases. Failure to recognize the importance of organizational culture to the individuals who work within that culture inevitably leads to resentment and resistance rather than progress.

Organizational culture is the result of a long history of experiences shared by the members of that organization. The customs, practices, values, and attitudes that evolve among constituents of the university must be recognized and respected by the leader of the organization before successful changes can be attempted. Schein (2004) summarizes the importance of this cultural phenomenon:

If we understand the dynamics of culture we will be less likely to be puzzled, irritated, and anxious when we encounter the unfamiliar and seemingly irrational behavior of people in organizations, and we will have a deeper understanding not only of why various groups of people or organizations can be so different, but also why it is so hard to change them. Even more important, if we understand culture better we will better understand ourselves—better understand the forces acting within us that define who we are, that reflect the groups with which we identify and to which we want to belong” (p. 10). “. . . it can be argued that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is their ability to understand and work with culture” (p. 11).

It is interesting to note that while unethical behavior did not appear as a factor in Leslie and Van Velsor’s (1996) research on for-profit companies, unethical behavior does seem to dominate the culture of corporate America as evidenced by the numerous media reports of unethical corporate behavior. Recent cases involving for-profit companies such as Smith Barney (Weidner, 2007) and Lehman Brothers (Cohan, 2009) highlighted

accusations and charges of unethical behavior by corporate executives. It appears that unethical behavior among top executives is a derailment factor in both educational and corporate settings. Clearly, unethical behavior as found in the public research institutions studied is not unique to higher education. Rather, unethical behavior among top executives appears to contribute to leader derailment in both educational and corporate settings.

### Methodological Issues

The use of multiple case study methodology was well suited for the present study. The combination of interviews, field notes, and document reviews provided an in-depth perspective of factors associated with presidential derailments in public research universities. However, two issues related to the methodology presented challenges to both the collection and reporting of the data required for this study.

The first issue relates to the collection of data that was perceived by participants as sensitive. McCosker, Barnard, and Gerber (2001) asserted that there are many topics that “within specific cultural and social context are ‘sensitive.’ Topics may be defined as ‘sensitive’ if they are private, stressful or sacred, and discussion tends to generate an emotional response.” Their research examined possible reactions when studying topics that were subject to controversy:

...the perceived risk may be psychological and/or physical in nature. They conclude that any data collection process, irrespective of the methodology, is that asking people questions about their views, knowledge, attitudes or life experiences, particularly related to "sensitive" phenomena, may generate emotional responses that should be acknowledged by the researcher and the research process (McCosker, Barnard & Gerber, 2001, paragraph 33).

This study involved issues that arise when dealing with such sensitive research. Despite the anonymous nature of the interviews, the politically sensitive nature of the circumstances involving presidential derailments resulted in feelings of fear on the part of interviewees of repercussions that could result from participation in this study. This fear prevented some individuals from participating, caused some individuals to withdraw their consent after interviews were completed, and caused hesitancy to fully disclose their opinions.

The present study encountered problems with incomplete data or occasionally missing data because the participants were unwilling to share feelings and experiences. The sensitive nature of presidential derailments led to a reluctance of certain individuals to participate. Of all the individuals approached for interviews, the most hesitant were members of the governing boards of the universities under investigation. Of the board members contacted, only one was willing to participate. In the end, only one alumni association president and a member of the university's board of governors agreed to be interviewed. One group of trustees could not participate on the advice of counsel, as legal matters were currently being mediated between the board and the derailed president. One sitting president was interviewed and subsequently withdrew permission for use of the interview based on advice of counsel due to impending legal action.

The second methodological issue involved presentation of the findings from the document reviews, especially information from local newspapers and publications directly related to higher education. The document review provided a substantial body of information that confirmed the derailment themes gleaned from the personal interviews.

However, providing specific quotations from or citations from many of these documents would result in a breach in the promise of confidentiality provided to each participant.

There is an increasing risk of a breach of confidentiality that could damage or embarrass participants in a case study that involves public information. There are increasing capabilities for individuals to link information across multiple sources found on the Internet (e.g., university documents, newspaper articles) (Citro, Ilgen, & Marrett, 2003). As a result, citations for the documents used in this case study have been withheld.

Despite the difficulties involved with research that deals with sensitive issues, the sample in the present study was sufficient in number. Additionally, the sample well-represented the population.

### Conclusions

Two conclusions may be drawn from this research. First, this study suggests that the factors that can lead to derailment in higher education transcend institutional context. Just as the departures of a corporate executive can irreparably damage a business, the sudden resignations and dismissals of university presidents can damage the reputation and fracture the constituencies of higher education institutions. The derailment factors uncovered in this research transcend the context of this study and apply to both the for-profit arena and institutions of higher education.

Finally, the research indicates that academic executives need to possess the traditional, conventionally recognized management skills to perform their jobs, but they also must possess the more difficult to measure value-based skills to allow them to stay in their positions long enough to effectively lead the institution forward. It is important that

these executives be able to administer large budgets and effectively navigate institutional change, but it is just as important for them to be able to make good, ethical decisions.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

The present study should be replicated at other public research institutions that have experienced presidential derailment to validate the findings of this study. Further, research should be conducted comparing derailment themes across the different types higher education institutions as classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2007) in order to determine which themes may be applicable to all institutions of higher education and which are unique to specific campus types.

Future research should be directed to the examination of the search processes used by public research universities, to determine if there are differences in the searches that have been successful and those that have led to the derailment of the selected president.

#### Implications

Derailments represent personal failure. The derailed president often does not possess a healthy value structure, which is represented by the derailment factors of unethical behavior and poor selection of advisors. It is fairly easy to determine that an individual has conventional management skills such as budgeting and planning, but it is much more difficult to measure the value structure of a candidate, such as how that person treats others or whether he or she might inspire an organization.

Prince (2005) suggests that the first step in preventing derailment in one's own career is the realization that leadership development is an ongoing process. Individuals must be able to learn, adapt, and develop on a continual basis. Specifically, Prince suggests that to prevent derailment, leaders must take responsibility for their own

leadership development. Leaders should seek feedback throughout their careers, seek developmental opportunities, seek coaching and mentoring, and, perhaps most importantly, take responsibility for their own development.

Derailments represent not just personal failure, but also represent organizational failure (Capretta, Clark, & Dai, 2008). Boards and governing agencies need to become aware of the characteristics of managerial derailment if derailments are to be prevented (Gentry et al., 2007) in sitting presidents and through effective search processes for new presidents. Presidents and presidential candidates should be aware of strategies they can employ to help prevent career derailment. With such awareness, derailment can be successfully managed at both the individual and organizational levels (MacKie, 2008). The derailment of an individual in a management position can cost the organization over 20 times that executive's salary in direct and indirect costs (Gentry et al., 2007). Presidential derailments are costly to universities in particular. These events cost educational institutions real dollars that are increasingly in short supply. Derailments are also costly in terms of public relations and in an overall loss of confidence in the institutions that suffer through the derailment phenomenon. Strategies that may help prevent such leadership disasters are worthy of further consideration.

The current economic climate places increasing pressure on leaders in higher education and puts presidential selections by boards and governing bodies at more risk than at any other time. These circumstances make analysis of the presidential mentoring, selection, and evaluation processes even more crucial. The derailment themes identified in this study can be used as a research base for organizational strategies that can be used

by hiring agencies such as governing boards that may prevent derailment and for personal strategies that can be used by individuals to help prevent career derailment.

While conducting the search process, it is important for boards and universities to protect the confidentiality of possible candidates in the early stages of preparing a candidate pool. Hiring groups, however, should conduct the selection process in as open a manner as possible. The appearance of anything less than a legitimate, credible search can cause mistrust of the new leader from the beginning of his or her tenure as president. This factor represented one of the themes observed in all four case studies. It is important for boards and hiring agencies to select the best possible individual for the top leadership role.

There is a possible disconnect between the interview process and the success rate of presidential candidates in public, research universities. Those responsible for hiring presidents should prioritize and strategize research-based derailment factors (Capretta et al., 2008). Understanding what is likely to create problems for presidents and what is likely to result in derailment can assist hiring boards in designing good interview strategies that result in good hires.

With research-based strategies and the concerted efforts of both individuals and organizations, presidential derailments in research universities can be managed and prevented.

Positions of leadership bring with them responsibility not only for delivery of outcomes, but for the engagement and wellbeing of staff that report into that position. Derailment is the thin end of the wedge of managerial incompetence that causes unnecessary harm and performance impairment throughout the organization. The good news is it can be managed successfully (MacKie, 2008).

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location of interview:

Interview participant:

Job/Position of participant:

### **Description of the study (to be read aloud to the interview participant):**

“The purpose of this study is to describe the factors associated with presidential derailment at public research universities. This study involves five public research institutions. I will be interviewing twenty separate individuals. The raw data from these interview sessions will be collected and placed in a locked, secure office on the campus at The University of Tennessee at Martin. To ensure confidentiality, all individual and institutional names (including location) will be changed in the final presentation of the data. The taped recorded interview should last approximately one hour.”

**At this point, the interview participant should read and sign the consent form.**

### **Questions:**

- 1) “What are the factors associated with presidential derailment (at your institution)?
- 2) What events may have occurred that contributed to or influenced the departure of the past president?
- 3) Is there anything else related to the departure of the president that you would like to tell me?

Appendix B

SAMPLE LETTER TO CURRENT PRESIDENTS

## SAMPLE LETTER TO CURRENT PRESIDENTS

**(DATE)**

**(NAME)**  
**(ADDRESS)**

Dear **(NAME)**:

I would like to invite you to participate in a doctoral study on presidential derailments. The purpose of this study is to describe the factors associated with presidential derailments in public research university settings. For the purpose of the study, presidential derailment is defined as a sitting university president who departs his or her position nonvoluntarily before he or she has completed five years of work.

I am writing to you because I am interested in researching the derailment situation that occurred **(TIME)** years ago at your institution. It is my plan to initiate research on the derailment behavior of university presidents in public research university settings. It will extend derailment research begun in the corporate sector, and it will provide a complimentary examination of whether the derailment factors found in this study have a relationship with those uncovered in corporate research.

You would be asked to participate in an in-depth, open-ended interview. The interviews should last approximately one hour. The interviews will be audio taped and then transcribed.

Upon the completion of the transcription, I would send you a copy of the transcription, if you request. In the data analysis stage, you would be asked to review the themes that emerged from the interview data to see if these themes match your memory of the events surrounding the derailment.

Above all else, your interview data would remain anonymous. All the participants and their respective institutions would be assigned pseudonyms.

The risks to the participants are expected to be minimal. Participants will be university administrators, faculty, and board members that are familiar with a past presidential derailment at their institution.

I will contact you by phone next week to see if you are willing to participate in the study. I would also like to speak with you about other members of the university community that might be interested in discussing the derailment situation, including a member of the senior or executive level administrative team, a board member, and a faculty member.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to speaking to you.

Cordially,

Keith S. Carver, Jr.

Appendix C

FORM B APPLICATION

# FORM B APPLICATION

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All applicants are encouraged to read the [Form B guidelines](#). If you have any questions as you develop your Form B, contact your Departmental Review Committee (DRC) or [Research Compliance Services](#) at the Office of Research.

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## FORM B

IRB # \_\_\_\_\_

Date Received in OR \_\_\_\_\_

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

### Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

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#### I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT

**1. Principal Investigator Co-Principal Investigator:**

Keith S. Carver, Jr. 328 Hall Moody Administration Building; The University of Tennessee  
at Martin; Martin, TN 38238  
[kcarver@utm.edu](mailto:kcarver@utm.edu); (731) 881-7636

**Faculty Advisor:**

Dr. E. Grady Bogue; 319 A Claxton Complex; The University of Tennessee, Knoxville;  
Knoxville, TN 37996  
[bogue@utk.edu](mailto:bogue@utk.edu); (865) 974-6140

**Department:**

Educational Psychology and Counseling; 525A Claxton Complex; Knoxville, TN 37996 (865)  
974-8145

**2. Project Classification:** Dissertation

**3. Title of Project:** A Study of Presidential Derailment in Public, Comprehensive Doctoral  
Universities

**4. Starting Date:** Upon IRB Approval

**5. Estimated Completion Date:** May 2008

**6. External Funding:** N/A

## **II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors associated with derailment of presidents at public research universities. For this study, a “derailed president” is defined as a sitting university president who departs his or her position nonvoluntarily before he or she has completed five years of work. Previous research on executive derailment has focused on for-profit leaders. One study (Leslie & Van Velsor, 1996) suggested four themes that were associated with derailment in the for-profit sector: problems with interpersonal relationships; failure to meet business objectives; inability to build and lead a team; and, inability to change or adapt during transition. Little research has been conducted focusing on derailment in education in general, and no relevant research on derailment has been conducted in higher education.

## **III. DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

1. The five case studies will involve in-depth interviews of at least four persons on each campus. These participants must have intimate knowledge of the factors and events associated with the derailment. The participants will include the sitting president, a second senior or executive level administrative officer, a member of the institution’s governing board, and a faculty member familiar with the derailment situation. In addition to the interviews, the researcher will utilize observational notes from the interviews and document review for data collection.
2. The researcher will utilize the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and other higher education materials to develop a list of universities that have experienced a derailment within the past seven years. Another source to be utilized will be the consulting firm of Alexander, Haas & Martin (Atlanta), an organization that has a vast development and marketing consulting business that focuses on education. The researcher will also utilize the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) for recommendations of research sites.
3. Once sites have been identified, the researcher will contact the sitting president to receive permission to conduct the study on their campus. A letter of permission will be utilized for this process.
4. The participating sites must have experienced a presidential derailment within the past seven years. Four participants from each site will be interviewed, bringing the total number of participants to at least twenty. The number of participants might exceed twenty, as the researcher will employ the concept of chaining should any of those initially interviewed indicate that there might be others having intimate knowledge of the derailment.

#### **IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

The researcher will utilize in-depth interviews, observation, and document reviews for data collection. In-depth interviews will be conducted for each campus case study. At least twenty interviews will take place for this study. The concept of chaining will be utilized should any of those initially interviewed indicate that there are others having intimate knowledge of the derailment.

The interviews will last approximately one hour.

Three questions will guide the interviews. The questions are as follows:

1. What factors did you perceive as contributing to the departure of the derailed president?
2. What events may have occurred that contributed to or influenced the departure of the past president?
3. Is there anything else related to the departure of the president that you would like to tell me?

Each interview will be taped and then transcribed. Observational notes will also be collected to provide relevant information related to pauses, body language, gestures, or any other action that cannot be detected by the audio tape. Document reviews will consist of any newspaper stories, trustee or board meeting minutes and proceedings, or journal articles that relate to the derailment. Each participant will be assured that their responses will remain confidential during this study. All participants will sign an Informed Consent Form prior to each interview. All research data and findings from the study will be locked in the Office of Development at the University of Tennessee at Martin. Only the researcher (Keith Carver) and Dr. E. Grady Bogue will have access to the research material. All of the research data will be destroyed once the study has been completed.

The data will be analyzed using a qualitative, inductive process. Transcripts and observation notes will be read and re-read; patterns and themes will be identified across and within the interview transcripts; data will be coded for themes; and comparisons will be made in respect to themes.

#### **V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES**

Risks to the participants are minimal. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time. Participants in the study will be university faculty, administrators, and board members that were involved with the university at the time of the derailment. All involved will be granted confidentiality. Only the researcher, Keith Carver, and Dr. E. Grady Bogue will have access to the research data. Each research participant will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form to ensure their right to privacy. Each participant will be able to terminate their involvement at any time during the study.

#### **VI. BENEFITS**

This study will initiate research on the derailment behavior of university presidents in public research university settings. It will extend derailment research begun in the corporate sector, and it will provide a complimentary examination of whether the derailment factors found in this study have a relationship with those uncovered in corporate research. The research can also be used to help boards and state agencies identify derailment behaviors in their current presidents, and these organizations could possibly conduct an intervention.

## **VII. METHODS FOR OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM PARTICIPANTS**

All research participants will be asked to sign Informed Consent Forms. Before the personal interviews begin, the researcher will read the content of the Informed Consent Form and ask each participant to sign it. A copy of this signed form will be given to each participant. (A copy of the form is attached.)

## **VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR(S) TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

The researcher is enrolled as a doctoral student for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education degree. The researcher has taken a course in qualitative research methods. The researcher is also being advised by a faculty member who is well-versed in qualitative research. Finally, the researcher has conducted much study into the body of contemporary derailment research.

## **IX. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT TO BE USED IN THE RESEARCH**

Interviews will take place at a location that is convenient for each participant. In many cases, the interviews will take place at their institution. All research data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Development at the University of Tennessee at Martin.

## **X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL/CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)**

*The following information must be entered verbatim into this section:*

**By compliance with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee the principal investigator(s) subscribe to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee. The principal investigator(s) further agree that:**

- 1. Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in this research project.**
- 2. Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to Research Compliance Services.**
- 3. An annual review and progress report (Form R) will be completed and submitted when requested by the Institutional Review Board.**
- 4. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board.**

**XI. SIGNATURES**

ALL SIGNATURES MUST BE ORIGINAL. The Principal Investigator should keep the original copy of the Form B and submit a copy with original signatures for review. Type the name of each individual above the appropriate signature line. Add signature lines for all Co-Principal Investigators, collaborating and student investigators, faculty advisor(s), department head of the Principal Investigator, and the Chair of the Departmental Review Committee. The following information should be typed verbatim, with added categories where needed:

**Principal Investigator: Keith S. Carver, Jr.**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Faculty Advisor (if any): Dr. E. Grady Bogue**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**XII. DEPARTMENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL**

**The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:**

**Expedited Review -- Category(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**OR**

**Full IRB Review**

**Chair, DRC:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Department Head:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Protocol sent to Research Compliance Services for final approval on  
(DATE): \_\_\_\_\_

Approved:  
Research Compliance Services  
Office of Research  
1534 White Avenue

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

---

For additional information on Form B, contact the Office of Research [Compliance Officer](#) or by phone at (865) 974-3466.

Appendix D

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

## Informed Consent Statement

### Presidential Derailment: Case studies of public research universities

#### **INTRODUCTION**

You have been invited to participate in a study on presidential derailments. The purpose of this study is to describe the factors associated with presidential derailments in public research university settings.

#### **INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY**

You will be asked to participate in an in-depth, open-ended interview. The interviews should last approximately one hour. The interviews will be audio taped and then transcribed. The researcher will send you a copy of the transcription, if you request. In the data analysis stage, you will be asked to review the themes that emerged from the interview data to see if these themes match your memory of the events surrounding the derailment.

#### **RISKS**

Risks to the participants are expected to be minimal. Participants will be university administrators, faculty, and board members that are familiar with a past presidential derailment at their institution.

\_\_\_\_\_ Participant's initials

**BENEFITS**

This study will initiate research on the derailment behavior of university presidents in public research university settings. It will extend derailment research begun in the corporate sector, and it will provide a complimentary examination of whether the derailment factors found in this study have a relationship with those uncovered in corporate research. The research can also be used to help boards and state agencies identify derailment behaviors in their current presidents, and these organizations could possibly conduct an intervention.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The data collected will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will only be made available to the researcher and his major professor. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link participants to the study.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have any questions or concerns during the study, you may contact the researcher, Keith Carver, at 328 Administration Building, The University of Tennessee at Martin, Martin, TN 38238 or at (731) 881-7636. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville at (865) 974-3466.

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any stage of the research without any penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection has been completed, your 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 the study.

Participant’s signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator’s signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

## VITA

Keith S. Carver, Jr. was born in Jackson, TN. Reared in Crockett County, TN, he graduated from Crockett County High School in 1988. After graduating from Memphis State University (TN) in 1992 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, he began work on his Master of Science degree from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

After graduating from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1995, he accepted a job with Marietta College (OH) as the Coordinator of Experiential Education. Two years later, he returned to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville to be a Program Advisor for the Office of Student Activities. In 1998, he started his career in development, accepting a job as Assistant Director of Development and Alumni Affairs at the University of Tennessee College of Law. He was promoted to the Director of Development position at the College of Law in 2001. He began his pursuit of the doctoral degree while working at the College of Law.

In 2006, he returned to his West Tennessee roots by becoming the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Development at the University of Tennessee at Martin. He has assisted the campus in successfully obtaining their \$40 million in the *Campaign for Tennessee*. Keith has recently completed the WestStar Leadership initiative, a regional leadership program focused on issues facing West Tennessee. His 2009 WestStar classmates awarded him the C.P. Boyd Award for Leadership.

An avid reader, runner, and fisherman, Keith lives in Martin, TN, with his wife Hollianne, their daughter Carson, and their sons Jack Thomas and Britton.