

IMPACT OF LEADER STYLE ON FOLLOWERS AND ORGANIZATIONS  
DURING THE UNPLANNED CHANGE OF COVID-19:  
A CASE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to describe the role of leaders in the Office of the Registrar in fostering a sense of effectiveness when dealing with unplanned change. A two-case study research approach was utilized to answer the following research questions: (1) What were the perceptions of followers, in the Office of the Registrar, of the role(s) their leaders played in fostering effectiveness during change (crisis)? (2) What were the self-perceptions of leaders, in the Office of the Registrar, of their role(s) in fostering employee effectiveness during change (crisis)? (3) How did COVID-19 impact the Office of the Registrar and the ability of the followers and leaders to cope with the crisis situation?

Qualitative methods were used in data collection which included open-ended semi-structured interviews. Two diametrically different higher education institutions were included in the case study with a total of fifteen participants being interviewed. Following the interviews, I conducted a deductive analysis using Blake et al. (1981), *The Academic Administrator Grid*, to determine the approach of the leader in relationship to two behavioral dimensions – concern for people and concern for institutional performance. In addition, I conducted an inductive analysis to determine themes based upon the lived-experiences and perceptions of participants in dealing with the impact of the pandemic.

The deductive findings suggest the leaders in the Offices of the Registrar were “comfortable and pleasant administration” and “team administration” on Blake et al.

(1981). Follower inductive themes were leader and follower alignment, leaders taking on tasks, concern for staff, delegation, and personal support. Inductive themes regarding leader and follower ability to cope with the crisis situation were (1) the impact of communication, (2) fulfillment of basic technological needs, (3) workload and work/life balance, (4) employee performance during the pandemic, (5) process change, (6) perceptions regarding staying remote or returning to the office, (7) team strength and compassion, and (8) lack of social interaction.

Future research should examine necessary leadership attributes required to facilitate unplanned change in higher education institutions and the long-term impact of crisis on organizational risk mitigation.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Herbert and Laura Schumann, who instilled in me the values of faith, family, persistence, and hard work. The lessons you taught, examples you set, and the compassion you have demonstrated, inspire me to be a better person. Thank you for your love and support.

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### **Contributors**

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Dr. Jennifer Strong, Associate Professor and Graduate Advisor; Dr. Barry Boyd, Associate Professor; Dr. Gary Briers, Professor of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications; and Dr. Ben Welch, Clinical Professor, Center for Executive Development. All work for the dissertation was completed independently by the student.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The rampant spread of COVID-19 with an estimated 114.6 million total infections in the United States from February 2020 to March 2021 had a significant impact on society (Centers for Disease Control, n.d.). Initial responses to the COVID-19 infection included businesses shuttering, residents being encouraged to stay home, the introduction of social-distancing and mask-wearing, and the transition of primary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education shifting to remote teaching and learning environments. The adjustment from in-person collaboration to remote work settings required leaders in organizations to react quickly to the pandemic and forced changes regarding how employees interacted, services were provided, and where organizations and their employees conducted their job responsibilities. Guyot and Sawhill (2020) noted the opportunities for telecommuting increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and may become permanent working arrangements in the future.

As the pandemic unfolded in early 2020, colleges and universities across the United States shifted to online teaching and class instruction while administrative units and functions that previously had been performed in-person quickly adjusted to work-from-home and telecommuting arrangements for staff. Fernandez and Shaw (2020) indicated “in academia, those in leadership positions at schools, colleges, and universities throughout the United States have responded to the crisis by closing campuses and residence halls, canceling commencements and moving their educational and associated activities online; as a sense of immediacy sweeps across the nation” (p. 40). The necessary transition to an online environment has impacted those involved in higher education by changing the nature of the work and how the work is performed; that transition has been a relevant and necessary change for most units and departments on a

college campus (Gigliotti, 2020). It has also impacted organizational culture and how leaders lead and followers follow. Levi (2017) recognized the culture, value system, beliefs, and norms of an organization influence the sense of engagement among staff and determine what is or is not acceptable behavior within the organization.

### **Background and Setting**

First referenced in 1446, the registrar position was once considered to be a faculty position and was included in the historical archives of Oxford University (American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, 2018). Originally developed to support institutional academic goals, a registrar was usually one of the first administrative positions created after the Office of the President. While the various roles and responsibilities of the Registrar have shifted through the years, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (2014) ascertains the Office of the Registrar is responsible for a variety of critical university functions including course and final exam scheduling; class registration; diploma distribution and degree conferral; commencement ceremonies; maintaining student academic records; institutional, state, and federal statistical reporting; production of the university catalogs; collection and processing of grades; creation and maintenance of student transcripts; and ensuring compliance with the Federal Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA). While these functions may vary by institution, the “Registrar is viewed as a campus leader and change agent, a key player at the hub of a complex academic system who serves an important role within the academic governance system” (Waters & Hightower, 2016, p. 20).

The organizational structure of a Registrar’s Office will vary by institution and generally is based on the size and type of institution, the functions for which the Registrar’s Office is responsible, and the number of staff members in the unit. The Registrar’s Office is usually led by

the registrar, some number of mid-managers in the office, and front-line staff to assist in administrative functions and processing. Major functions of the Registrar's Office have included regular and consistent engagement with campus stakeholders, which historically has necessitated the need for the Registrar's Office to be located "on-campus" and available for in-person interactions.

### **Significance**

Blankenberger and Williams (2020) assert the integrity and accountability of institutions of higher learning, along with the interconnected nature of the people, systems, technology, and accrediting bodies in higher education, will continue to shift and evolve in both the short and long term. But the authors stop short in recognizing the impact of the changes necessitated by COVID-19 on those administrative units within colleges and universities that shifted from an in-person to remote working environment in a condensed time frame. As we have all experienced, the initial and continued impact of COVID-19 changed so many things, yet it is difficult to quantify and qualify the impact of those changes. This study is significant because there is a need to understand the impact of leaders in the Office of the Registrar in fostering a sense of engagement and effectiveness for their followers when dealing with unplanned change from an in-person working environment to a remote one.

A majority of the higher education research response to COVID-19 was focused on the faculty shift to remote teaching environments and measuring the success of new teaching methods; budget constraints for institutions of higher learning; leadership during a crisis; and measuring student success in remote learning environments while supporting students with various financial and personal challenges. There has been little research related to the Office of the Registrar and the COVID-19 impact on the leaders, staff, and their sense of engagement and

effectiveness while transitioning from an in-person work environment to one that is remote, and the impact of their return to campus and the “new normal” working conditions. Given the critical nature of the core services that the Office of the Registrar provides on college and university campuses across the nation, this lack of exploration presents a gap in the literature.

### **Research Objective**

The purpose of this study was to describe the role of leaders in the Office of the Registrar in fostering a sense of effectiveness when dealing with unplanned change. The focus was on institutions of higher education, and specifically, the Offices of the Registrar who were forced to become remote working environments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These remote working changes, introduced out of necessity, presented a new element for leaders in the Registrar’s Office and staff in the office as the transition to remote working introduced new ways of engaging, interacting, creating, and implementing to best support faculty, staff, and students of the institution. Piotrowski and King (2020) recognized, during COVID-19, higher education institutions were forced to transition to a remote working environment which left “some employees responsible for critical university operations (are) ill-equipped to perform functional responsibilities and assigned duties in a virtual environment” and that “support staff whose job functions require face-to-face interactions and/or physical university presence are potentially irrelevant in the virtual academic environment” (p. 62). This finding should be explored in depth and through the lens of the Office of the Registrar.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the perception of followers, in the Office of the Registrar, of the role their leader played in fostering effectiveness during change (crisis)?

2. What is the self-perception of leaders, in the Office of the Registrar, of their role in fostering employee effectiveness during change (crisis)?
3. How did COVID-19 impact the Office of the Registrar and the ability of followers and leaders to cope with the crisis situation?

### **Scope and Limitations**

A case study, which is transferrable to other situations and is designed for a thick and descriptive analysis of the case being studied, allows for generalizations that describe and demonstrate “the variety of mutually shaping influences present” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 41-42). Because case studies are based on real-life situations, the findings of a case study can influence future research (Merriam, 2009), yet it is important to recognize a limitation of a case study is that it offers a “good opportunity for innovation and challenge current theoretical assumptions...however, it can be difficult to establish a cause-effect connection to reach conclusions and it can be hard to generalize, particularly when a small number of case studies are considered” (Queirós et al., 2017, p. 377).

### **Definition of Terms**

To aid in a common understanding of various research specific leadership and theoretical terms, following is a list of defined terminology:

**Assigned leadership:** Occurs when someone is considered to be a leader given their role, title, or position within an organization (Northouse, 2019).

**Case Study:** Utilized in social science research when the “main research questions are how or why questions; a researcher has little or no control over behavioral events; and the focus of study is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon” (Yin, 2014, p. 2).

**Deductive Analysis:** An approach to data analysis whereby the qualitative researcher analyzes the data with a predetermined theory, criteria, thought, or assumption (Patton, 2002).

**Effectiveness:** Described by Blake et al. (1981) as the “1) concern for institutional performance and 2) concern for people.” An administrator should be “concerned with getting results, either directly or through others...and also “concerned with people –other administrators, faculty members, students, benefactors, the public” (p. 9).

**Engagement:** Can be described “as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind” for an employee (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295).

**Epistemology:** Addresses how the researcher may “know what we know” and is based upon how the researcher may view a particular situation, context, what is known and/or unknown, how the researcher was exposed to information, and the beliefs that may have been formed about the knowledge (Klenke, 2008).

**Follower:** “Those to whom leadership is directed” (Northouse, 2019, p. 6). Followers work alongside leaders “to achieve common goals, and both share a moral obligation regarding these goals” (p. 295).

**Followership:** A “process whereby an individual or individuals accept the influence of others to accomplish a common goal” (Northouse, 2019, p. 295).

**Inductive Analysis:** An approach to qualitative analysis that allows the themes and patterns to emerge from the data. A qualitative researcher approaches an inductive analysis with no preconceived assumptions or hypothesis about the data or what will be uncovered through the analysis of the data (Patton, 2002).

**Leader:** An individual who is assigned to a position of authority or someone who emerges and “acquires support from others” (Northouse, 2019, p. 15). Leaders have an “ethical

responsibility” to their followers and work in concert with “individuals who are trying to achieve something together” (p. 6).

**Leadership:** A “process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2019, p. 5).

**Member checks:** A method to establish the credibility of the research being conducted. Member checking allows for the person being interviewed to correct any errors or items that may have been interpreted incorrectly, add further detail or information, and review and agree to what has been transcribed and/or recorded. Member checking begins the data analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Ontology:** A philosophical approach that addresses “what is the nature of reality?” A qualitative researcher endorses a “relativistic ontology” that there is not a single reality, but multiple realities that are construed by those individuals within the environment being studied (Klenke, 2008).

**Peer debriefing:** Aids in establishing the credibility of qualitative research. Peer debriefing occurs when a professional who is outside of the context of the study is consulted “to analyze materials, test working hypotheses and emerging designs, and listen to the researcher’s ideas and concerns” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 140).

**Positional Power:** Is obtained through the position someone holds within an organization. Those with positional power are more able to influence others because of the role and higher positional status they hold within the organization or group (Northouse, 2019).

**Qualitative Research:** A research approach that “investigate[s] the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials” (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 424).

**Remote working:** A type of work arrangement that takes place in an environment that is not in an office setting. This flexible arrangement allows for employees to work in their homes or other off-site locations (Gartner, n.d.).

**Snowball sampling:** Described as a purposeful approach to sampling that involves the initial identification of certain individuals to participate in the study. During the interview process, the interviewee will be asked to identify additional individuals who should be contacted for participation in the study (Merriam, 2009).

**Thick description:** An important component of qualitative research that provides the reader with details about what is being studied in sufficient detail to know everything about the subject they need to know and understand. Based on the thick description, the reader should also be able to make their own decision about the transferability and generalizations of the presented findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Punch, 1998).

**Transferability:** As a qualitative researcher, transferability of the conclusions or findings cannot be automatically applied to other similar contexts. Through the use of thick descriptions, the transfer of context or conclusions to other similar situations is left to be determined by the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Triangulation:** A “mode of improving the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 305). Triangulation establishes the credibility of what is being studied by confirming the findings across multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Trustworthiness:** Steps undertaken by a qualitative researcher to provide the reader with the assurance that the study has “truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

**Unplanned change:** Occurs when there is a necessity to change due to unforeseen changes in the organization's environment (Shaw, 2017).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on society and our daily lives, as well as on how organizations function and how leaders in those organizations engage with their staff. The pandemic has caused employees to make changes regarding when and where their tasks are completed and to implement and adopt new ways of working (D'Auria & De Smet, 2020).

The stress and impact of COVID-19 were exacerbated in institutions of higher learning by the openness of the campuses, their relationships with external entities, and the large populations of people engaging in teaching and research (Perlmutter, 2020). As research pertaining to leadership and the impact on higher education in response to the pandemic and organizational influences continues, new literature is emerging on leadership in times of crisis, unplanned change, work/life balance and burnout, employee performance, and employee sense of safety, engagement, and effectiveness.

#### **Positive Leadership Impact in a Time of Crisis**

The pandemic is not the first time leaders have been forced to manage organizations in crisis. Historical figures such as Roosevelt, Churchill, Lincoln, and Kennedy have all been recognized for their approaches to crisis leadership and handling of unplanned events and situations (Koehn, 2020). These leaders have been lauded for their honesty, recognition of people's fears, demonstration of purpose, changes of direction as new variables and situations were introduced, and demonstration of empathy and care (Koehn, 2020).

Many of the traits of successful leaders during previous world crises would be equally valuable today in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Platts et al. (2022) studied the impact of

the pandemic on employees and found leadership quality decreased the stress levels of employees with pre-existing mental health conditions.

In a study of middle-managers in higher education, Perlmutter (2020) concluded successful leaders communicated appropriately with their staff, responded to their constituents, developed internal crisis response plans, and coordinated and communicated with upper administration about potential problems. Similarly, traits such as flexibility, staff engagement, decisiveness, honesty and transparency, promotion of self-care, and demonstration of resilience were all identified as characteristics of successful leaders during the pandemic (Dirani et al., 2020). “Leading during a crisis requires leaders to be agile and resilient, and open to the challenges that the crisis brings,” (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021, p. 207). Leaders should possess awareness and self-perception of how their leadership approach may affect others, a recognition of differences between their followers, an understanding of tasks the follower is being asked to complete, and a recognition of any environmental factors that may influence the organization or its work (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021).

A previous case study found the characteristics of effective academic leaders during the pandemic included “the leader’s personal attributes; emphasizing responsibility and adaptability; and building on previous experiences as a leader” (Dumulescu & Muțiu, 2021, p. 6), while D’Auria and De Smet (2020) asserted that the character of the leader is the most valuable and important attribute that can be brought into a crisis situation. Lawton-Misra and Pretorius (2021) describe a leader’s display of empathy as a “crucial tool offering a way to connect, promote inclusiveness, and create a sense of community in a void of physical interaction” (p. 209).

Weiss and Li (2020) indicated, as organizations navigate the pandemic and seek to rapidly implement changes, their leaders must communicate frequently with their followers and

explain decisions that may evolve in response to new information, variation in infection rates, or other changes in the health situation. In addition, it is important for leaders to reach their staff via a variety of communication modalities to avoid “information overload” (Weiss & Li, 2020).

Bolden (2020) indicated “collective leadership” is the preferred method during times of crisis, allowing individuals and groups to work together to accomplish desired outcomes. Similarly, D’Auria and De Smet (2020) asserted, in times of crisis, the top-down approach to leadership must be abandoned and replaced with a multi-disciplinary network of teams. Teams should be empowered around the common purpose of the organization and encouraged to develop solutions in their areas of expertise, while demonstrating transparency, collaboration, and distributed decision-making. This responsive approach to leadership allows for those best positioned within the organization to understand the environment and context to mobilize, collaborate, and respond (Bolden, 2020).

### **Destructive Leadership Impact in a Time of Crisis**

However, not all leaders have a positive impact or demonstrate the necessary characteristics to assist their organization in times of crisis. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, researchers identified errors of leadership that were detrimental to hurricane relief efforts. These included a lack of timely and effective communication between various entities, a lack of coordination between relief providers, and ambiguous authority relationships (Watson, 2020). Similarly, Kapucu and Van Wart (2008) cite various critical leadership mistakes in the navigation of the hurricane response, including the absence of contingency, mitigation, and strategic planning; a lack of trust, coordination, and cooperation between organizations and people; an inability to be adaptable and flexible; inefficient usage of people; and catastrophic communication failures.

When COVID-19 hit the United States in March 2020, leaders faced similar challenges and hurdles to overcome in their respective organizations. During the crisis, Brandebo (2020) found leaders whose behaviors were deemed by their followers to be destructive were likely to negatively affect the followers' motivation and ability to complete their assigned tasks. These destructive leadership behaviors included being "over-controlling, not involving others; lack of decisiveness; avoiding responsibility; ambiguity; becoming stressed and losing control; egocentricity; threatening and punishing; and not displaying respect and understanding" (Brandebo, 2020, pp. 572-575). Kellerman (2005) describes bad leaders as those who are "incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular, and evil" (p. 44).

Brandebo et al. (2016) sought to determine whether "bad" leadership was "stronger" than good leadership and whether destructive behavior could outweigh the positive attributes of a leader. The authors found those followers who viewed their leader as exhibiting destructive behavior were more likely to report mental exhaustion and a desire to leave the organization than those followers who viewed their leader as having constructive leadership behaviors. The followers who reported constructive leadership behaviors also reported more "trust in the immediate supervisor and work atmosphere" (Brandebo et al., 2016, p. 704).

### **Unplanned Change**

Unplanned and unexpected changes in an organizational environment create stress and pressure (Knowles & Saxberg, 1988). In times of crisis, an unplanned change can be positive, creating an opportunity to reflect on the current organizational approaches and allocation of resources. However, if the organization is too rigid and inflexible, an unplanned change can become a threat to the existence of the organization itself (Knowles & Saxberg, 1988). If organizational changes are successful, the momentum introduced by the unexpected pivot – in

this case, the pandemic – can be utilized to implement more necessary changes (Weiss & Li, 2020). Individual and organizational responses to the pandemic are not only about the immediate reaction, but also have long-term impact on future directions (Dhoopar et al., 2021).

Romig (2021) emphasized, to prepare for unplanned change in an organization, it is vital to consider flexibility, scalability, and adaptability; consistent monitoring as problems arise; the development of new ways to evolve and adapt; and coordination among stakeholders to ensure continuity. Similarly, D’Auria and De Smet (2020) indicated, when dealing with the unplanned change created by a crisis situation, leaders should adopt a “pause-assess-anticipate-act” approach. This recursive methodology provides the opportunity to present a sense of calm and avoid overreaction as problems present themselves. The leader should begin by pausing, reviewing the situation from varying viewpoints, anticipating future needs and issues, and only then deciding on the new approach (p. 5).

Weiss and Li (2020) conducted a study of medical education program leadership and responses to the pandemic and unplanned change. They concluded the leadership of these programs should “create a guiding coalition” to assist in decision-making, problem-solving, policy development, and change implementation. While their study focused on medical education training programs for training pediatric residents during the pandemic, they also provided relevant insights into applications that can be used by other higher education organizations affected by the pandemic.

In response to the emergence of COVID-19, an estimated 1,100 colleges and universities across the United States closed their campuses in March 2020 (Hess, 2020). This unplanned pivot from in-person learning, teaching, research, and administrative support had a significant impact on students, faculty, and staff of college campuses. Miller (2021) found, while the basic

functions of teaching and research continued, “it is likely that the pressures exerted from the pandemic will force institutions to make many revisions to the processes of their work” (p. 90). COVID-19 and the transition to remote-working forced organizations to rethink employee engagement and development, regardless of when and where the work was being performed (Rogers et al., 2021). Vo-Thanh et al. (2021) encouraged employers to utilize the pandemic as an opportunity to develop online training tools for employees to obtain new skills for use while working remotely.

### **Work/Life Balance and Burnout**

As the pandemic progressed, research began to indicate employees who had transitioned to remote-working were being negatively affected in terms of their work/life balance. Kaugars et al. (2022) found parents who worked from home during the pandemic reported higher levels of feeling overwhelmed, along with a “decreased ability to perform as parents” and an increase in anxiety and depression from pre-pandemic times (p. 142). Similarly, Vinberg and Danielsson (2021) determined, during the pandemic, the leaders of organizations with fewer than 10 staff experienced changes in their leadership roles, a surge in the number of work tasks they were expected to complete, and an increase in their overall workload.

For employees who worked overtime during the pandemic, Platts et al. (2022) found a decline in employees’ sleep quality and an increase in depressive symptoms, especially in those individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions. Furthermore, those who worked from home were found to experience “significantly higher levels of stress and depression” than those who continued to go into their offices or usual locations of work (Platts et al., 2022, p. 8).

In addition to the work/life balance challenges introduced by the pandemic, constant stress and continuing changes triggered job-related burnout for many employees. In a

presentation to the Southwestern Surgical Congress, Dr. Sharmila Dissanaïke (2016) described burnout as not only a state of consistent stress caused by long working hours, but a narrowing of the perspective of the person, causing them to feel overwhelmed and unable to see possible solutions. Dissanaïke indicated, in a situation where an employee is “drowning” and unable to save themselves, outside assistance may be needed to provide support and perspective for the overwhelmed and “burned-out” employee to reach a resolution.

Gabriel and Aguinis (2022) provided recommendations for how leaders and organizations can create positive workplaces during times of crisis and unrest to combat these feelings of burnout. These recommended leaders “provide stress management interventions; allow employees to be active crafters of their work; cultivate and encourage social support; engage employees in decision-making; and implement high-quality performance management” (p. 191).

### **Employee Performance**

The pandemic created significant disruption for employees and organizations regarding how and where their work was conducted, as well as how their performance was measured. Aguinis and Burgi-Tian (2021) considered the importance of measuring employee performance and found, during the pandemic, constant changes to employee responsibilities made it difficult for leaders to measure performance and conduct performance evaluations. The authors’ observed evaluations are more than simply providing feedback; they are also about maintaining focus on organizational objectives and strategic direction, providing opportunities for staff development and growth, seeking feedback on better ways to support staff during the pandemic, and developing organizational succession planning (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2021).

One research study measuring the impact of one organization’s pandemic response on employee satisfaction, job insecurity, and job performance found when employees were satisfied

with the COVID-19 response of their organization, they adopted “positive behaviors and attitudes to maintain their job performance” (Vo-Thanh et al., 2021). The authors also found these employees were more likely to feel stable in their role and with their organization and to trust those around them, which in turn created a willingness to work harder during the tumultuous times created by the global pandemic.

Research indicated, during the pandemic, employee performance was improved when organizations took “care of individual emotional needs,” including “self-management, social awareness, self-awareness, and relationship management” (Dhoopar et al., 2021, p. 149). In addition, organizations that demonstrated flexibility, employee empowerment, resiliency, and capability were able to foster employee retention and performance during times of crisis (Dhoopar et al., 2021).

### **Employee Sense of Safety, Engagement, and Effectiveness**

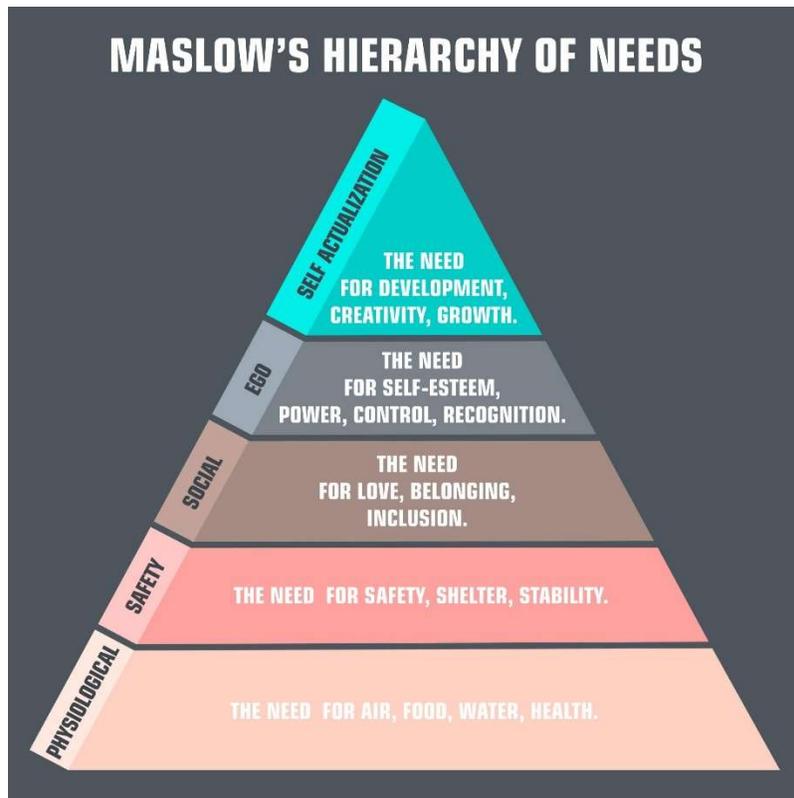
As traditional workplaces exchanged in-person collaboration for virtual working, the ways in which staff members engaged with one another also changed. Langvik et al. (2021) found, for employees forced to work remotely, “the extent to which respondents reported missing their colleagues was a significant predictor of stress” (p. 5). Organizations that transitioned to remote-working were affected in how they were able to communicate within their teams, including the interpersonal interaction between leaders and followers. Levi (2017) found the culture, value system, beliefs, and norms of an organization influenced the sense of identity among staff and determined what was acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The pandemic also required “leaders to acknowledge the personal and professional challenges employees and their loved ones experienced during a crisis” (D’Auria & De Smet, 2020, p. 5).

COVID-19 and subsequent workplace changes created a sense of unrest, both for individuals and organizations. Staff were fearful for their own safety and that of their families; they mourned the loss of social interaction and struggled with instability due to constant changes to their work and how it was to be accomplished (Gabriel & Aguinis, 2022). Lawton-Misra and Pretorius (2021) asserted these factors required leaders to connect with their followers on a more personal level and to “demonstrate qualities of empathy, compassion, mindfulness and sensitivity,” while understanding “that a one-size-fits-all response could not be applied” (p. 208).

To support employees as they grapple with the personal impact of the pandemic and the workplace changes, leaders must demonstrate and promote psychological safety and the open discussion of ideas, concerns, and questions (D’Auria & De Smet, 2020), while empowering staff to learn, grow, and develop their own individual sense of resilience and flexibility (Dumulescu & Muțiu, 2021). Samoilovich (2020) found individuals and organizations can be motivated to success if their needs are met and realistic perspectives and expectations are established and clearly communicated.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) is relevant to discussions in the context of the pandemic and its impact on employee sense of safety, engagement, and effectiveness. This model provides an explanation for the needs that promote human behavior and theorizes an individual must first fulfill their basic needs before moving on to pursue higher-level needs. These basic needs are physiological needs, and the following levels are for safety, love and belonging, esteem, and, ultimately, self-actualization. See Figure 1 – Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

**Figure 1.** *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*



*Note:* From Shutterstock.

As leaders grapple with the impact of COVID-19 on their respective organizations and seek to connect more effectively with their teams, they must display “self-awareness, compassion, empathy, vulnerability, and agility,” which may also assist with their own personal responses to the anxiety created by the pandemic (Lawton-Misra & Pretorius, 2021, p. 209).

## Theoretical Framework

*The Managerial Grid*, developed by Blake and Mouton (1964), comprises two behavioral dimensions: concern for people and concern for production. Concern for people “is the degree to which a leader considers the needs of team members, their interests, and areas of personal development when deciding how best to accomplish a task” (Khan et al., 2015, p. 47), while concern for production “is the degree to which a leader emphasizes concrete objectives, organizational efficiency and high productivity when deciding how best to accomplish a task” (p. 47).

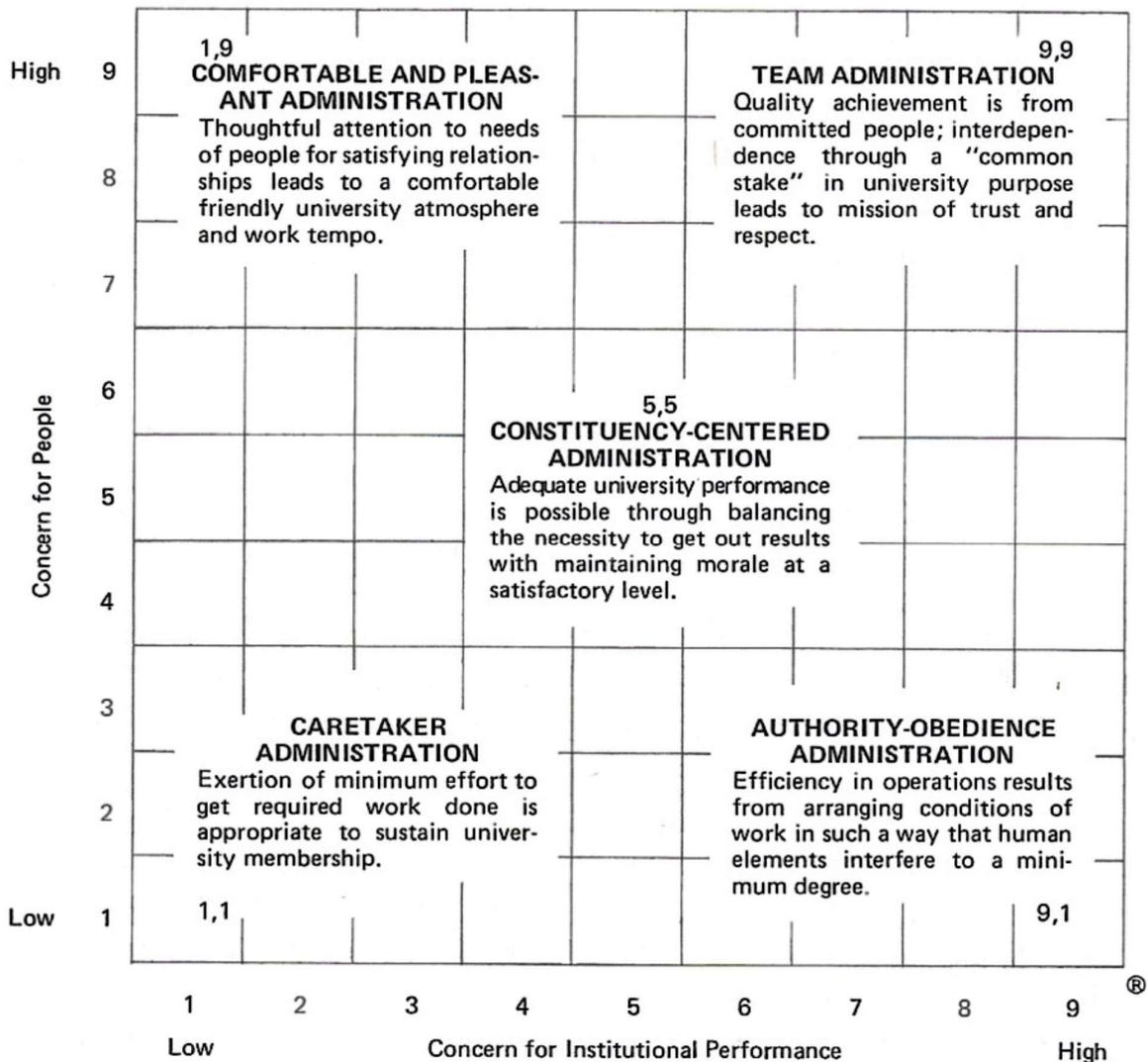
In 1981, the original *Managerial Grid* was modified by Blake et al. for use in higher education. The adaptation, known as *The Academic Administrator Grid*, provides a framework for understanding “concern for institutional performance” and “concern for people,” as seen through the lens of higher education academic administrators. *The Academic Administrator Grid* is used as my theoretical framework in this qualitative study (Blake et al., 1981).

*The Academic Administrator Grid* differs from its precursor in its focus on the functions for which an academic administrator is held responsible. Blake et al. (1981) identified these activities as “implementing institutional mission; supporting teaching and learning; establishing the curriculum; supporting research and scholarly productivity; encouraging community and institutional service; managing resources; supervising personnel; coordinating student affairs; managing external relations; and assuring basic operations” (pp. 30-44).

*The Academic Administrator Grid* identifies five major “grid styles” for academic administrators. These styles are as follows: caretaker administration (low concern for institutional performance, low involvement with people); authority-obedience administration (high concern for institutional performance, low concern with people); comfortable and pleasant

administration (low concern with institutional performance, high concern with people); constituency-centered administration (moderate concern with institutional performance, moderate concern with people); and team administration (high concern from institutional performance, high concern for people). See Figure 2 – *The Academic Administrator Grid*.

**Figure 2.** *The Academic Administrator Grid*



*Note:* Blake, et al. (1981). *The academic administrator grid: A guide to developing effective management teams*. Jossey-Bass.

Blake et al. (1981) asserted there are 81 possible combinations of “concern for institutional performance” versus “concern for people” on the grid, but the theory focuses on the extreme four corners and the middle, as these demonstrate the most distinctive approaches of academic administrators. The authors argue that each academic administrator has a dominant grid style of their own but employs back-up strategies “when a dominant strategy fails or when an administrator is feeling the strain of tension, frustration, or conflict” (p. 16).

An important observation by Blake et al. (1981) is that, when academic administrators approach new situations, each brings their own assumptions and these may or may not be congruent with the reality of the situation. Nonetheless, these assumptions inform the viewpoint and guide the behavior of the academic administrator. To combat the practice of acting on assumptions without first confirming reality, Blake et al. (1981) encouraged academic administrators to test their assumptions with a colleague to ensure they have an accurate depiction of the situation and any pre-conceived notions they are bringing into the situation.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

#### **Research Design**

When determining an appropriate research design to adequately answer my research questions, I first had to consider two major research paradigms – quantitative and qualitative – to ascertain which was a more appropriate and applicable approach to the study of leadership. Quantitative research, which focuses on a single reality and causes between various relationships, (Fraenkel et al., 2015) allows for the testing of hypotheses and replicability across large groups of people (Klenke, 2008). However, quantitative research is deficient when studying leadership as it is “poorly suited to help us understand the meanings of leaders and followers ascribe to significant events in their lives and the success or failure of their organizations” (Klenke, 2008, p. 4).

Conversely, utilizing a qualitative research approach for the study of leadership, which allows for “why” questions to be answered, provides useful information for the researcher and reader to interpret the thoughts and opinions of the participants, which makes the participant experiences more applicable and practical (Bryman et al., 1988). Qualitative research, which is constructed of multiple realities, allows for the participant context and environment to be included as part of the analysis along with “what the participants are thinking and why they do what they do” (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 425).

Because my research frame is that of a social constructivist viewpoint, meaning it is both context-dependent and participant-dependent, my research methods will be approached through the lens of a qualitative research perspective. This methodology allows for the different

perspectives and lived experiences of the participants to be infused within the context being studied (Patton, 2002).

### *Ontology*

Crotty (1998) described ontology as the “study of being” and a “way of understanding what is” (p.10) while Creswell and Poth (2018) described ontology as “the nature of reality and its characteristics” (p. 20). These two definitions, along with my personal experiences in higher education, influence and shape my research approach, methodology, participant engagement, and data collection and analysis.

My ontological viewpoint asserts that the participants in my research study will have different experiences and all viewpoints are valid. There is no “right or wrong” in how the participants may view the world, and my goal as a researcher is to gain an understanding of their personal reality and understanding of what is (Patton, 2002).

### *Role of Researcher*

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument and the success of their research is based upon their commitment, approach, rigor, and competence (Patton, 2002). As a researcher using the social constructivism approach, I seek to describe and understand the world around me and to develop meanings and understandings based upon those with whom I interact (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I embrace there is no single reality, yet am interested in studying the thoughts, beliefs, goals, and assumptions of those participants in my study (Fraenkel et al., 2015). Through sustained interaction and engagement with the participants, I “address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans’ lives and social world ... and whether the research participants’ subjective meanings, actions and social contexts, as understood by them, are illuminated” (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 717).

Because qualitative research involves the researcher as the key instrument to collect and analyze data, and given my personal experiences in higher education and the Office of the Registrar, I must acknowledge my own lived experiences regarding the role of a leader in supporting the effectiveness of an organization and in developing a sense of engagement amongst staff (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My first assumption, and lens through which I view leadership, is the assertion to be an effective leader one must approach leadership through an emergent leadership position and gain support from his or her followers. My experiences in higher education allow me to recognize many of the leadership positions within the institution are based on the leader's assigned position within the organization. I have witnessed the impact when a leader relies solely on their assigned position of power and the use of coercion to accomplish organizational goals. This approach not only impacts the individual followers, but also the organizational culture, effectiveness, and engagement between the leader and follower as well as the institution.

The second assumption I bring to my research is to be an effective leader in higher education, one must recognize and understand the organizational culture of the institution. Birnbaum (1988) described that within institutions of higher education, there are patterns that exist within the institution and organizational culture. Those higher education administrators who can recognize the patterns are more effective than those who do not. From my own experiences in the university setting and balancing the varying levels of influence and power – faculty governance, student engagement, fellow administrators, and alumni needs – I have an awareness and understanding of the constant barrage of patterns that emerge within the institution. I bring the experience of balancing these different constituency groups and importance of organizational culture to my thought processes.

In order to be an effective qualitative researcher, I must set aside these assumptions and experiences to view the participants and their responses with a fresh perspective. I engaged in the process of reflexivity, an awareness of my perspectives and how they may impact my research lens with which I view the world (Patton, 2002). Through reflexivity and a continual self-review and awareness of my potential biases and assumptions, I am able to control any potential impact to my research and findings (Klenke, 2008) and recognize how my “personal, cultural, and historical experiences ... may shape my interpretation” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24).

### *Epistemology*

A social constructivist viewpoint allows for individuals to “seek understanding of the world in which they live in work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). As a researcher with the framework of a social constructivist, my approach will be to rely, utilize, and derive meanings from the interactions with both leaders and followers within the Office of the Registrar regarding their view of the world and experiences they have encountered because of COVID-19. I will engage in open-ended questioning and listen carefully to what is said, or in some cases unsaid, and base an interpretation on what is found (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Erlandson et al. (1993), described the importance of “looking, listening, feeling, and smelling” as part of the interview process and asserted “intuitive observation” is a critical component of a qualitative researcher (p. 98).

In the case of my constructivist research frame, I derived meaning from the responses I received from both the leaders and followers in the Registrar’s Office and conducted a deductive analysis to determine the perceptions of a leader’s concern for people versus concern for institutional performance. Crotty (1998) reinforced that the social constructivist approach is

appropriate as “there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our own engagement with the realities in our world” (p. 8).

### *Qualitative Analysis*

A qualitative research approach is appropriate for leadership studies because of the multidisciplinary nature of the subject and the leadership context being examined. My goal is to obtain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon in the natural setting and explore the “why” types of questions about leadership” (Klenke, 2015) and to determine themes and generalizations that can be further investigated for future organizational leaders when dealing with forced change (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

When deciding among the different qualitative research approaches, I selected a case study method because in a case study the researcher “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information . . . , and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 96-97). The bounded system included in this case study are the leaders and followers within the Office of the Registrar who have experienced an unplanned change and shift from in-person working to a remote working environment as a result of COVID-19. In particular those generalizations, based upon the real-life experiences of those in the Office of the Registrar, describe and demonstrate “the variety of mutually shaping influences present” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 41-42).

A deductive analysis will be used to determine the perceptions of a leader’s concern for people versus concern for institutional performance based on *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981). Because the qualitative research was conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and various working transitions from in-person to remote, the perceptions

and experiences of the participants were not “lost by time,” a critical element of a case study approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The outcome of a case study is the determination of themes and generalizations that can be further investigated and researched (Fraenkel et al., 2015).

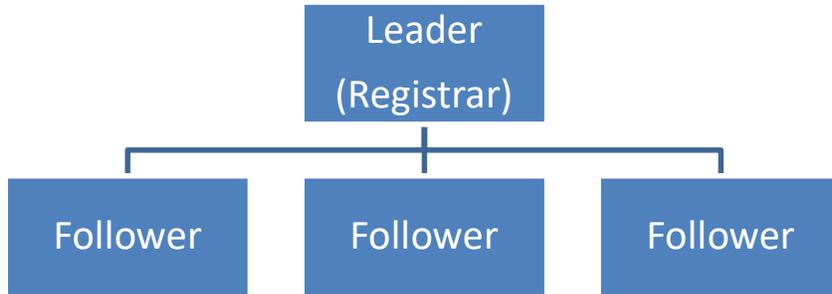
Though the research approach for this study is qualitative in nature, the viewpoints, thoughts, experiences, and observations gleaned from my research participants, their lived experiences, and their “authentic voices” allowed for the determination whether their organizational leader was more concerned with people or concerned with institutional performance during this time of forced change and organizational transition.

#### *Case Selection*

A two-case research approach was selected because of the contrasting organizational structures, environments, missions, and sizes of the two institutions. As stated by Yin (2014), “analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases ... will be more powerful than those coming from a single case” (p. 64). University A is a private, undergraduate, liberal arts institution of approximately 1,500 students. University B is a public, comprehensive research institution of over 50,000 students.

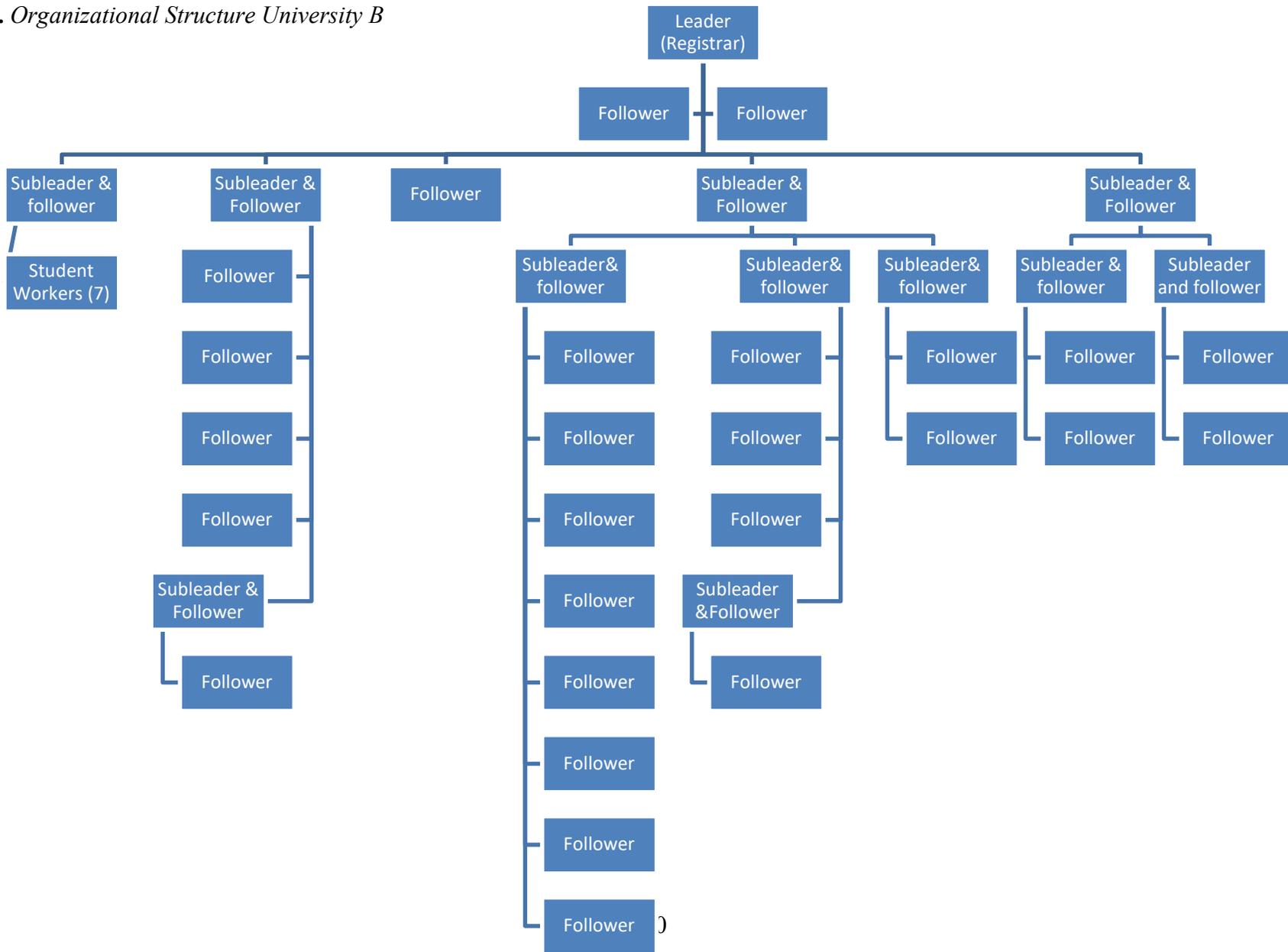
The Office of the Registrar organizational structure of University A comprises the university registrar with three direct reports – an associate registrar, an assistant registrar, and an administrative support staff. See Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** *Organizational Structure University A*



The organizational structure of University B is much more hierarchal in nature and comprises the university registrar, a senior associate registrar, and two associate registrars. There are seven assistant registrars that are led by and disbursed among the three associate registrar positions. Each of the assistant registrars has varying numbers of staff for whom they provide management and leadership within the Registrar’s Office. The organizational chart for University B contains listings indicating a total of 38 staff with an additional seven student workers. See Figure 4.

**Figure 4.** *Organizational Structure University B*



As a qualitative researcher, importantly, I spent time in the natural environment with the participants to better observe and experience the context of the research setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, because of COVID-19 protocols, local and state guidelines, as well as the personal preference of those being interviewed, in-person gatherings and limited face-to-face indoor interactions was a consequence of the global pandemic. All but two of the participant interviews were conducted via Zoom at the time of the participant's choosing. Given the impact of COVID-19 on in-person gatherings, the interviews being conducted in the "virtual field" was appropriate given the nature of the research study in determining the leader's role in fostering effectiveness when shifting from an in-person working environment to one that is remote. When this research began in fall 2021, the "virtual field" remained the "natural setting" for some organizations in the United States.

## **Participants**

### *Selection Process*

When determining participants to contact for my research study, I discussed potential options with my faculty dissertation chair and committee members regarding which institutions to solicit for participation. Because a two-case study design was selected as the research approach, two diametrically different types of institutions of higher education were selected as the unit of analysis. A purposive sampling of both leaders and followers in the Offices of the Registrar from the two institutions was selected given their experiences in working in the Office of the Registrar while dealing

with the unplanned change of shifting from an in-person working to remote working due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval (Appendix A), I began the solicitation of participants for the research study. I contacted the registrar via email (Appendix C) at three different institutions to ask if they would be willing to participate. After receiving a positive response from the registrar at University A, I contacted the individual to establish an interview time and to ask their preference of meeting in-person or via Zoom. The individual selected to meet via Zoom. During the interview process, I asked the registrar to provide me with the names of followers or colleagues who had adapted and adjusted to the workplace changes introduced by COVID-19 and those who may have struggled with imposed changes. I then contacted those individuals to see if they would be willing to participate in the case study as well.

After completing the four interviews from University A, I then scheduled an interview with the university registrar from University B. During my interview with the registrar from University B, I also asked about colleagues and followers who would be appropriate to participate in the case study. I was provided with additional names of five subleaders/followers within the Office of the Registrar at University B to contact.

During the solicitation process, I provided the potential participants with a written description of the case study along with a consent form for them to review and sign (Appendix F). The consent form included information regarding the goal of the case

study research project, any potential risk the participants may incur, information on the voluntary nature of the research project, and that the participants could decide to cease involvement in the study at any time (Appendix F). Once the signed consent form was received, the form, along with all other data, was stored in an encrypted and secure environment to ensure the confidentiality of the information and the identity of the participants.

All participants who were interviewed as part of the research were currently employed in the Registrar's Office at either University A or University B. While their tenure of employment ranged, i.e., some were recent hires into the Office of the Registrar while others had been part of the organization for twenty years, their employment in the Office of the Registrar ranged sometime between March of 2020 and January of 2022. This allowed the participants to witness first-hand the role of their leader in fostering a sense of effectiveness among staff during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the impact of COVID-19 and the many workplace transitions on the Office of the Registrar within their institution.

#### *Participant Descriptions*

A total of 34 individuals were contacted to participate in the study. At University A, four participants were contacted via email to be interviewed as part of the case study. All four agreed to participate in the study which included one male and three females. At University A, the formal gatekeeper, the Registrar, notified the team of his personal

involvement in the interview process and encouraged them to participate, if they so desired. In addition, access to the participants in University A was established via peer-to-peer encouragement between colleagues within the Office of the Registrar (Seidman, 2019).

At University B, participants were initially invited via a “snowball sampling” approach by contacting those participants who had been suggested by earlier interviewees from University B. Given the size of the Office of the Registrar at University B and the hierarchical nature of the organization, the snowball sample approach was used as a way to capture the social knowledge and the dynamic nature of the social relationships within the Office of the Registrar (Noy, 2008). After the initial contact and interview with the registrar, an additional five names were provided. These individuals provided additional names to solicit for participation. One participant also provided an organizational chart for the Office of the Registrar at University B which allowed for additional solicitation from other Office of the Registrar staff members who may not have been identified via the snowball method.

From University B, a total of 29 participants were invited via email to be interviewed as part of the case study. Of the 11 who chose to participate from University B, there were three males and eight females interviewed. Fifteen did not respond to the invitation to be interviewed at University B. Three individuals responded to the invitation and declined to participate. One individual chose not to participate after

receiving further information about the study along with the consent form. Another individual indicated that she was facing serious health issues and would be unable to participate. The third individual said that she was too busy for participation in the interview process.

The individuals who participated in the study were grouped into two samples. The first sample comprised one leader and three followers from University A. The second sample comprised individuals from University B. Due to the organizational structure of the Office of the Registrar at University B, the group consisted of one leader, six subleaders, and four followers. Of the six subleaders, in addition to having a leadership role, they also had a follower role within the organization.

### **Organizational Typologies**

Organizations are categorized into typologies to provide a framework for the organization and to describe how people may be motivated within the organization. These typology frameworks provide order to what is being observed and define “how things work” within the organization by creating a common vernacular and reference point to predict other phenomena (Schein, 2004). By understanding typologies, organizations are better able to gauge individual reactions and plan approaches when faced with a similar scenario or situation. Schein (2004) suggested the relationship between an individual and the organization is considered “as the most fundamental dimension around which to build a typology” (p. 191).

In reviewing the various typologies, I would assert that the Office of the Registrar at University A is a normative organization. Schein and Schein (2017) described a normative organization as one where individuals contribute to the organization because the goals of the institution align with their personal beliefs. The followers within the Office of the Registrar at University A recognize the role of their leader, yet the relationships within the organization are informal and are based upon the responsibilities of the office and overall commitment to the institution (Schein & Schein, 2017).

In addition to being a normative organization, University A could be described as a “task culture,” a typology model introduced by Charles Handy who described organizational characteristics in relationship to Greek Gods. Task culture, referred to as “Athena,” is an organization focused “on results and organizational effectiveness, on the execution of work using appropriate tools, the right people for the job, and autonomy” (Russo et al., 2013, p. 15). In the case of a task culture organization, the result justifies the means and members are recognized for expertise and knowledge (Russo et al., 2013).

When reflecting upon the organizational structure of University B, I would assert that the Office of the Registrar is a bureaucracy. A bureaucracy, defined as an “organization designed to accommodate large-scale administrative tasks by systematically coordinating the role of many individuals” and one that has various reporting lines and lines of communication within the University (Blau, 1956, as cited in

Birnbaum, 1988, p. 107). The work completed within the Registrar's Office at University B "flows" through the various levels within the organization and is based on rules and regulations of the institution. In addition, the hierarchal nature of the organization allows for a division of labor within the Registrar's Office and for the staff to become specialized in specific functions while the structured regulations and specific job responsibilities create consistent application of policies when presented with varying student and faculty situations (Birnbaum, 1988). As described by Strong (2015), a hierarchical organization is bureaucratic in nature, is stable, its role is formal and fully accepted, its behaviors and outputs are based upon various rules and regulations, and there is little within the organizational structure left to the "unknown."

When applying the typology model by Charles Handy (1985) to University B, I ascertained that the appropriate typology is the "role culture" which aligns with the Greek God "Apollo." The description of a role culture is one that has "order and rules; functions and roles; descriptions and definitions; interaction between top management and the base controlled by procedures for each role; functional division of work" (Russo et al., 2013, p. 15). A role culture is safe and predictable environment for employees.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection occurred over a 5-month period between September 2021 and January 2022 and involved two Offices of the Registrar from institutions located in the southern United States. The primary techniques for collecting data were semi-structured

interviews along with field notes collected during the interview process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants as “they consist of a series of questions designed to elicit specific answers from respondents. Often they are used to obtain information that can later be compared and contrasted” (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. 449). I compiled field notes from participant interviews to keep record of the setting of the interviews, any direct quotations, and observations made during the interview process (Merriam, 2009). These notes allowed me to provide a thick description of the environment and organizations being studied.

#### *Interview Protocol*

I developed a list of interview questions to assist in guiding the conversation with the participants, yet allowing flexibility to follow up on applicable and relevant topics as they were introduced by those being interviewed. This approach allowed me to engage in active listening to better understand what the participant was saying and follow up on issues that may have been incomplete or needed further clarification (Seidman, 2019). A set of semi-structured interview questions was developed for leaders in the Office of the Registrar (Appendix D) with another list of semi-structured interview questions was developed for followers in the Office of the Registrar (Appendix E).

As a qualitative researcher, my initial plan and preference for this study was to spend time in the natural environment with the participants to better observe and experience the context of the research setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, due to

COVID-19 protocols and to allow for the personal safety preferences of those being interviewed, I provided the participants the option to meet in-person or via Zoom.

Thirteen of the participants chose to participate via Zoom. Two participants participated in the interviews while attending the Texas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (TACRAO) annual meeting in Lubbock, Texas. The interviews were scheduled to last approximately 60 minutes and were scheduled based upon the availability and preference of the participants.

The interviews were recorded via the Zoom recording feature which allowed for verbatim transcription from each of the interview sessions. A transcription service, GMR Transcription, was employed to assist with the verbatim transcription from each of the interviews. To ensure the security and confidentiality of the participant data, a secure encrypted server was used to upload the audio from each of the interview sessions to GMR Transcription. In addition, the transcripts were stored with pseudonym participant names and were electronically saved on a password protected and encrypted computer. GMR Transcription also provided a signed non-disclosure and confidentiality document (Appendix G). The interviews ranged in time from 22 to 60 minutes. Depending upon the participant being interviewed, the semi-structured question protocol, pertaining to either the leader or the follower or a combination of both protocols, was used.

When interviewing followers within the Office of the Registrar at University A and University B, I began the interview process by asking the followers to describe how

long they had worked in the Office of the Registrar at their respective institution and their individual job responsibilities pre-COVID, during COVID, and during their return to campus. The follow-up questions focused on their experiences dealing with the transition to remote working, their interactions and engagement with their leader, the transition and return to campus, their perception of the challenges moving to and from remote work, and their view of their leader's effectiveness during the various transitions.

For the leaders who were interviewed, similar questions were asked and began with how long they worked at their respective institution along with asking them to describe their job duties pre-COVID, during COVID, and during the return to the "new normal" working conditions. Follow-up questions included the transition to remote work, how they facilitated or supported their staff during the transition, the shift back to "new normal" office conditions, and their perceptions of the various transitions and staff effectiveness and engagement.

Due to the hierarchal nature of University B, the six subleaders were also followers within the organization. In this instance, I used both interview protocols and asked the questions related to their experiences as a leader within the Office of the Registrar and also their experience as a follower within the Office of the Registrar.

#### *Field Notes*

When beginning the interview process, I first created a journal to collect field notes of my personal thoughts and observations of the interviews along with my

reflections regarding the interview process, follow up, or concerns that were raised. I made note of the interview setting, any observations about what the participants may have left unsaid, or areas that I should review with my peer debriefer (Erlandson et al., 1993). Prior to each subsequent interview, I reviewed the field notes to determine if any early themes were emerging from the notes, and if the ideas needed to be pursued in following interviews (Patton, 2002). In addition, throughout the research and data collection process, I practiced the process of bracketing, an approach of setting aside my presuppositions “to see the phenomenon as it is” (Klenke, 2008, p. 227).

After transcribing the interview notes, I compared the transcribed transcripts to my field notes to see if there were any additional insights gleaned from the conversations. In addition, I discussed my observations and any concerns with my dissertation chair to address any potential issues that may need to be accounted for during the research process.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

To begin the data analysis process, I first read through the transcripts multiple times while underlining key text (words/phrases) and making notes in the margins regarding any ideas or thoughts about the responses (Yin, 2014). I parsed the ideas presented into the smallest amount that could “stand by itself” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 345) and placed the ideas on 4x6 index cards. In the margins of the index cards, I

indicated any key words, phrases, or thoughts that were included in the participant statements.

My decision to hand code and utilize a paper-based approach to analyze my data was based upon the influence of my committee chair and also by my personal preference. As described by Creswell and Poth (2018) the use of computer-based software to analyze data “interferes with the analysis by creating distance and hindering creativity” (p. 209). Throughout the hand-coding and data review process, I was able to read and re-read the interview responses multiple times and reflect upon what was said, or in some instances, what was not said. This continued and iterative review of the data allowed me to have an intimate familiarity with my data that was helpful as I began sorting the data into themes and categories.

To begin the deductive analysis of the research, I thoroughly reviewed each of the leader and follower interviews and made notes in the margins regarding task behaviors versus those that are more people-oriented. The deductive analysis was based on two behavioral dimensions – the concern for people and the concern for institutional performance – fundamental components of *The Academic Administrator Grid*, developed by Blake et al. (1981). *The Academic Administrator Grid* (1981) outlines the concern for people including “other administrators, faculty members, students, benefactors, the public – whomever the administrator deals with on a day-in and day-out basis” (p. 9). The concern for institutional performance is defined as “concerned with

institutional outcomes and with achieving institutional goals” (p. 9). Based upon the responses received from both the leaders and the followers, I determined where on *The Academic Administrator Grid* the leader from both University A and University B were located.

To inductively analyze the data, I re-read each of the statements from both the leaders and followers and made notes regarding the topics, ideas, thoughts, and experiences of the participants. I began the inductive review process with no preconceived assumptions or hypothesis about what would be uncovered and allowed the themes and patterns to emerge from the data (Patton, 2002). Based upon the ideas and patterns that emerged, I developed the themes and categories that were consistently uncovered from the participant viewpoints.

### **Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Reliability**

Qualitative researchers must ensure the dependability and authenticity of their research. Dependability occurs when a systematic process is followed while authenticity occurs when the researcher is cognizant and aware of his or her beliefs and perceptions in relationship to what is being studied (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the qualitative approach of validity and reliability in comparison to quantitative terminology. For example, they describe credibility in qualitative research as the equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research; transferability in qualitative research being synonymous with external validity in quantitative research; dependability

in qualitative research being analogous to reliability in quantitative research; and confirmability in qualitative research comparable to objectivity in quantitative research.

To ensure the credibility of my research, I engaged in the process of peer debriefing. While conducting my interviews, I periodically met with my committee chair to discuss the interviews to gain insight and potential interpretations of the data. Peer debriefing allowed my dissertation committee chair to provide differing opinions, to play “devil’s advocate,” and assist in identifying any potential blind spots of which I was unaware (Klenke, 2008). Throughout the peer debriefing process, we also discussed potential working hypotheses and my feelings regarding the research and interview process. My peer debriefer provided honest and candid feedback and asked probing questions to challenge my initial reactions to the data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As mentioned, credibility, which is akin to internal validity in quantitative research, bolsters the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings. To ensure the credibility of the data collected during the interview process, I provided the participants with the opportunity to review the transcriptions of their interview sessions. This process, called member checking, allowed the participants to ensure that what was recorded was accurate and also to provide any additional feedback or thoughts on their interview responses (Punch, 1998). Four of the interview participants provided feedback on their transcribed interview text.

Another method to ensure the creditability of my research was to have prolonged engagement with the participants and organizations included in the study (Klenke, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe prolonged engagement as learning the culture of an organization through extensive involvement and observation. Because the interviews took place over a five-month period and involved multiple individuals with varying levels within the organization, I was able to obtain a “full picture” of the organization, challenge any assumptions or misinterpretations, and establish trust with the individuals from the respective institutions. Also, because the data collection took place over a prolonged period of engagement, any distortions or impact to the culture of the organization caused by the cyclical nature of the work within the Office of the Registrar were avoided (Erlandson et al., 1993).

The triangulation of different sources of data, including interviewing both leaders and followers within their respective institutions, ensured the credibility of the research. Triangulation, which involves “utilizing multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 229), allows for the researcher to understand inconsistencies across different data elements (Patton, 2002). In my research study, interviewing different leaders and followers in varying positions across the two Offices of the Registrar allowed for triangulation of the ideas presented by the participants. Throughout the interview process, I would triangulate the comments or assertions made by previous interviewees to obtain a rich and varied description of viewpoints from those

being interviewed. Those pieces of data that were validated by another source proved more valuable and enhanced the context of the study because they were sources validated by triangulation (Erlandson et al., 1993). In some cases, only one follower of a subleader was interviewed as part of this study. Those instances are notated in their respective sections.

When discussing the concept of transferability, qualitative researchers utilize thick descriptions to “paint a portrait” of those being interviewed, provide a vivid description of the culture of the organization, and define what was seen and heard during the interview process. A thick description utilizes direct quotations (Fraenkel et al., 2015) and includes any information the reader may need to know to better understanding the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By using a thick description, the researcher provides the reader with the opportunity to make judgements on whether the findings are transferrable and can be applied to other scenarios (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability can be illuminated via the creation of an audit trail to describe and define how the research process was conducted. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the auditing concept developed by Edward Halpern which includes the retention of raw data and interview recordings; notes pertaining to the field observations and interview summaries; an outline of the themes utilized; any process notes relating to the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research; and information regarding the creation of the interview instruments (pp. 319-320). By creating an audit trail of the

research process, I was able to review and confirm the process of collecting data and reflect upon the research approach taken.

After completing the data collection process, reviewing the transcription, providing the transcripts to the participants for member checking, reviewing, and coding the data, and analyzing the emerged themes, I then began preparing and articulating the findings, as presented in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This study explored the role of leaders, within two institutions of higher education, in dealing with unplanned change and the impact of COVID-19 on the Office of the Registrar. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States in early 2020, a majority of higher education research has been focused on the faculty shift to remote teaching environments and measuring the success of new teaching methods; budget constraints for institutions of higher learning; leadership during a crisis; and measuring student success in remote learning environments while supporting students with various financial and personal challenges. There has been little research related to the Office of the Registrar and the COVID-19 impact on the leaders, staff, and their sense of effectiveness while transitioning from an in-person work environment to one that is remote. Given the critical nature of the core services the Office of the Registrar provides on college and university campuses across the nation, this lack of research presents a gap in the literature.

A qualitative framework was used to obtain the perspectives of both leaders and followers within the Office of the Registrar. Two institutions, vastly different from each other, were selected for a two-case study analysis. The results are based on the social

construction of reality from the leaders and followers who were interviewed. The qualitative study was based on the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of followers, in the Office of the Registrar, of the role their leader played in fostering effectiveness during change (crisis)?
2. What is the self-perception of leaders, in the Office of the Registrar, of their role in fostering employee effectiveness during change (crisis)?
3. How did COVID-19 impact the Office of the Registrar and the ability of the followers and leaders to cope with the crisis situation?

This chapter presents the findings of the lived experiences of the 15 leader and follower participants from two institutions in the southern United States. Each of the participants was employed within the Office of the Registrar during the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced some element of forced change, remote working, and a transition back to campus. To protect the identity of the participants, those from University A were given proper names with the letter “A” while participants from University B were assigned proper names with the letter “B.” Each participant also was provided with a surname indicating their role within the respective institution – Leader, Subleader, or Follower.

I first provide a descriptive narrative of the two institutional campuses and the Office of the Registrar, prior to March 2020. I then provide thick descriptions of the perceptions of both the leaders and followers of their experiences, the themes uncovered,

and finally utilize the themes to conduct both deductive and inductive analyses of the participants' responses.

### **Office of the Registrar Before COVID-19**

#### *University A*

University A is situated in the suburbs of a large urban city in the southern United States. A small, private institution, the diverse student body participates in a variety of activities and organizations. Founded in the mid-1800s, University A boasts selective admission standards and prides itself in a significant financial endowment. Picturesque campus buildings are located among perfectly manicured landscaping and flower beds.

Prior to March 2020, University A, as an undergraduate, liberal-arts institution, had never offered online courses or provided student services in a virtual format. The Office of the Registrar, a small staff of four employees, prided itself in the individual service and assistance they could provide to students who visited their office to add or drop a class, deliver a change of major form, register for an independent study course, submit paperwork to receive their Veteran's Assistance benefits, or complete a final degree audit. Many of the processes were paper-based and allowed for the "extra touch" a friendly and welcoming Registrar's Office staff member could provide in-person.

The tight-knit staff of the Registrar's Office worked harmoniously in completing their work and enjoyed catching-up on the news from around campus. Three of the team

members had worked together for four years prior to the pandemic, with one joining the Registrar’s Office in the Summer of 2020. The Registrar’s Office staff interacted and engaged with the campus community – faculty, staff, and students – and were a consistent and reliable fixture within the University A campus community.

When COVID-19 caused much of the United States to shut down in mid-March 2020, the employees within the Office of the Registrar at University A quickly shifted and adapted to obtain the necessary technology, revamp paper-based processes, and determine how to support the campus community in a remote environment.

#### *University B*

University B, a land-grant institution located in a mid-sized city in the Southern United States, is a member of the American Association of Universities. The institution offers undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and professional degrees and boasts a strong commitment to academics, research, and service.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of the Registrar at University B boasted a tight-knit group of employees who collaborated frequently. The office floor plan was an open-concept “bull-pen” with few walls and large spaces for collaboration. In the hallway, glass scrum boards were hung for staff to “huddle” and brainstorm. In the break room, an unfinished puzzle was set out for staff to collaborate during a break, lunchtime, or unplanned “puzzle party.” One participant described how the office honored “Purple Shirt Tuesday. We wear purple shirts on Tuesdays. It’s completely

arbitrary, but just some weird thing we do. It's just part of being part of the Registrar's Office, right? We all – we have to think of just things to do that make us unique and – and lend to, um, a sense of belonging to some weird group of some sort.” She also described how every-other-day, other than Tuesday, the staff members proudly wear the school colors. On any given day, the office-hosted themed staff celebrations involving food, fun, and fellowship. One participant, who was new to the Registrar's Office, described the office as being “swag happy” with Office of the Registrar branded paraphernalia given to everyone.

When working on projects or during daily interactions, the staff in the Registrar's Office frequently utilized the open concept floor plan to catch-up and collaborate. It was “easy to see” who was “in” and who was “out” because everyone was within eyesight in the large open spaces. The staff huddled together around the scrum board to brainstorm and “piled together in cars” to go to lunch off-campus.

In early March 2020 as information increased about the potential impact of the COVID-19 infections across the United States, the Office of the Registrar at University B began preparing and discussing possible “what if” scenarios. Staff members were encouraged to begin thinking about what they would need to work remotely, with many staff hypothesizing it would be impossible and improbable an institution of their size and complexity would move entirely remote. Little did the leaders and followers of the Registrar's Office know, when an email message was distributed on a Saturday telling

everyone they needed to stay home and begin work remote, their pre-planning and “what if” scenarios had somewhat prepared them for the changes they suddenly faced.

**Research Question #1: What were the perceptions of followers, in the Office of the Registrar, of the role(s) their leader played in fostering effectiveness during change (crisis)?**

To obtain an understanding of the followers within the Office of the Registrar regarding the role their leader played in fostering effectiveness during change, I asked followers to describe the role their leader played in transitioning to remote work, the engagement and communication they had with their leader, to indicate what their leader did exceptionally well during the various workplace modifications, and if their personal views on their leader shifted or adjusted during the pandemic.

Based upon the perceptions of their followers, I applied *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981) to the characteristics described by the followers about their leaders and deduced where on *The Grid* the leaders were located. Of the leaders and subleaders who participated in this study, and based upon their followers’ perceptions, I found the following two Blake et al. (1981) leadership approaches: Adam Leader was identified as “comfortable and pleasant administration” while Betty Leader was identified as “team administration.” For one leader, Bianca Subleader, I was unable to deduce where on *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981), she was located.

To conduct an inductive analysis, I examined the participant data to determine themes, based upon the perceptions shared by the followers about their leader. This was an iterative process and required continual review of the participant comments to ensure that I had a good understanding of their perceptions (Erlandson et al., 1993). The inductive themes discovered were leader and follower alignment; leaders taking on tasks; concern for staff; delegation; and personal support.

### *University A*

#### **Adam Leader**

The followers of Adam Leader, the university registrar, at University A described him as being “super accommodating,” everyone gets along “really well,” and how he trusts his followers to do their jobs. Angela Follower, an assistant registrar at University A, described how Adam is “basically the type of leader that realizes that, you know, we do something, we’re very good at what we do. And so, he doesn’t bother keeping up with being the expert in that. Right? Because, he knows, ‘Okay, I’ve already got somebody who’s – who is that expert.’” Angela indicated when someone asks Adam a question for which she is the expert, Adam will refer the individual to Angela “because that’s her expertise.”

When the pandemic initially hit in March of 2020, Amanda Follower, the associate registrar at University A, described Adam as a hard worker and how he shouldered most of the responsibilities for the student records specialist, Ava Follower.

Amanda described how she “felt a little bad for him because, I don't think anybody knew how hard he was working all the time. He was working constantly, while he had three kids at home.” Amanda detailed how Adam was concerned about the accuracy of Ava’s work and because Ava did not have internet at her home, “he was doing his job, and a lot of her (Ava’s) job.”

Ava concurred with Amanda’s assessment about how Adam “pretty much took that over, revamped everything, and has been doing it himself just to make sure that everything is running smoothly, running correctly.” Ava relayed how Adam is planning to transition the work back to her “once he feels that everything is running smoothly enough without any issues” and “he'll teach me how to do the digital part of it now and how it’s done now in comparison to what I learned” when she began her position at University A.

During the transition to remote working, Angela Follower stated Adam did not provide much assistance with the various changes for her processes. She said, “I’m probably already way ahead of what he would think of, anyways. Right? So, I think he’s like, ‘I don’t need to do anything. She’s got everything covered. She – she does more things than I would even think of.’”

Both Amanda Follower and Angela Follower indicated their appreciation for how Adam lets “them do their thing” because he knows “I’ve got two really good people in these positions that I can trust to do what they’re supposed to do.” Ava described the

work environment as “calming ... peaceful ... and not hectic” and concurred with Amanda and Angela’s sentiments by saying, “You know, we all – we know our responsibilities. We do what we’re supposed to do.”

Angela indicated Adam’s assistance in her transition to remote working with the “things that impacted me the most (was) probably very minimal.” She did acknowledge Adam Leader “probably helped with the facilitation of ensuring that we all had access to Adobe Sign very quickly.” Both Angela and Amanda stated there was no real change in their workplace autonomy from pre-COVID to post-COVID times. Amanda indicated, “I just figured it out myself” and Adam “was supportive and that he trusted that if we weren’t sure how to do something that we would ask and that he would be there to help us.”

All three followers – Amanda, Angela, and Ava – described Adam, both before the pandemic and during the pandemic, as the type of leader who “waits for you to come to him if you need help with something instead of constantly hovering to make sure you’re doing what you’re supposed to do.” Amanda acknowledged Adam “doesn’t like to delegate” and “will hold everything and get everything done, even when it’s somebody else’s task to do.” On the contrary, Ava viewed Adam’s approach to taking on tasks as being “commendable” and asserted “I’m sure that, you know, we could’ve possibly helped him, but it’s difficult when you know you want things done a certain

way, you wanna do it yourself, you know? And I think that – that’s pretty much where he was at. So, like I get it.”

In terms of Adam’s communication with the team, Angela described there was decreased engagement while they were working from home and the team did not have the same “robust conversation” they did pre-pandemic. She indicated both pre-COVID and post-COVID, she and Adam would huddle up to meet and discuss various issues, but while working from home “unless it was something that like literally blew up,” and a video call was warranted, Adam’s “engagement downward” decreased. Since their return to the campus, Angela acknowledged their interactions and engagement is “back to where it used to be pre-COVID.” During remote working, the team did host “occasional” departmental meetings, so Adam could keep the team “up-to-date on the policies that the institution was coming out with, with all this COVID stuff” regarding future return-to-work plans.

Ava described how Adam was approachable both before the pandemic, while working from home, and now when they have returned to campus. She acknowledged how she can approach Adam to ask, “Am I doing this right?” or, “Is this the way you want me to do this?” and he is “very receptive, very helpful, always.” Ava asserted Adam, “has a lot of hats, and he manages to somehow to stay on top of everything” and how “he’s always about being precise and being accurate” and “catching mistakes before they happen.”

*Deductive Findings: Adam Leader*

Based upon the feedback from the followers of Adam Leader, I would assert on *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981), Adam is a “comfortable and pleasant administration” based upon his belief “that when people are happy, results will take care of themselves and there will be little or no need for supervision” (p. 14).

All of Adam’s followers – Amanda, Angela, and Ava, reinforced his position on *The Academic Administrator Grid* through their statements regarding how Adam allowed them to perform their jobs without much intervention or supervision. Blake et al. (1981) indicated a leader who is located on *The Grid* as “comfortable and pleasant” is one who assumes followers “know what to do and how to coordinate with each other” and the leader will provide assistance as requested. For example, Amanda Follower’s assertion about how Adam allowed her to determine how to complete her work, and he “was supportive and that he trusted that if we weren’t sure how to do something that we would ask and that he would be there to help us,” reinforced Adam as a leader who aligns with the “comfortable and pleasant administration” approach.

Another example of a “comfortable and pleasant administration” is related to how a leader places “a high priority on good relations” to create an environment that is warm and friendly for the staff (Blake et al., 1981, p. 125). In the case of Adam Leader, Ava described how much she enjoyed working in the Registrar’s Office because it was nothing like her previous employer, a high school with a “toxic environment.” Ava

Follower stated working at University A is “a very peaceful place, very calming place,” and she is “blessed every day that I can work here.” She described Adam as being “very easy to get along with” and “very understanding.” These comments reaffirm Adam’s alignment on *The Academic Administrator Grid* as a “comfortable and pleasant administration.”

In terms of supervising personnel, Blake et al. (1981) indicated a “comfortable and pleasant” approach as a leader who finds difficulty in giving performance evaluations and criticizing someone else. In the case of Ava Follower, she described how when she made mistakes in the past, Adam counseled her “to be more aware of your details because a little slip can mess up” and create a “domino effect” for a student. When Ava apologized for the errors, Ava described Adam as saying “Oh, you’re fine” without providing any additional supervisorial coaching beyond general statements “to be more careful.” Amanda Follower also acknowledged how Adam overcompensated for Ava’s errors by taking on Ava’s work. Amanda described how due to a “situation with our support person” who is “really great with customer service skills, but sometimes, the attention to detail isn’t there,” Adam “was doing his job, and a lot of her job.”

*Inductive Findings: Adam Leader*

Theme One: Leader and Follower Alignment.

For University A, the leader and followers are in alignment with their approach to communication and “getting things done.” For example, Angela Follower described how Adam is “a type of leader that I need.” She stated she is “a very independent person. Like I said, I don’t like to be micromanaged. Just tell me what I need to do, and I will do my thing. So, I don’t actually expect, um, a lot of interaction unless there’s a specific reason for it.” When asked about something Adam Leader did exceptionally well during the pandemic, Angela responded with “other than let me do my thing?” She reiterated she does not “like someone who’s constantly hovering over me. ‘What are you doing? Are you doing what you’re supposed to do?’ Right? I’ll – like, to me, it’s like, that’s the thing I – I like the most about him (Adam) is that he trusts you to do what you’re supposed to do.”

In the case of Amanda Follower, she reinforced Angela’s comments and asserted she had a “really good relationship with Adam” and does not “need micromanaging, which I appreciate because, I, you know, like, you hire me to do a job, I know what I’m doing, I’ll ask you questions if I have them. And we just do what we’re supposed to do.”

For approaches to meeting and communication during the pandemic, both Adam and Amanda stated their disdain for meetings. Amanda said, “none of us really like to have meetings. So, when we’re having these, you know, impromptu discussions, a lot of

the times, we're problem-solving, you know, at that point, rather than saving it up and talking about it in a meeting." Adam's feedback was in alignment: "I am not a meeting person. I meet when I need to meet. And I just – the idea of meeting to meet drives me crazy. And I know some people are into that. I am just not." During the remote working and various transitions, the team from University A maintained their weekly meetings while other departments within the University met more frequently.

Angela described how she and Adam had similar personalities, ideals, and professional experiences. She attributes this similarity to making for a positive and effective working relationship because their approaches are in alignment. She said, "He will basically let you – he waits for you to come to him if you need help with something instead of constantly hovering to make sure you're doing what you're supposed to do. Right? So, I think he initially gauges how well you're doing. If he has confidence in that, then he just lets you go and do your thing." Angela indicated one her favorite phrases is "suck it up, butter cup, make it happen," an attitude and approach she attributed to having a "fairly smooth transition" to remote working because she likes having autonomy and getting the job done.

#### Theme Two: Leader Taking on Tasks.

Another inductive finding uncovered was related to how Adam Leader, "took on tasks" during the pandemic transitions instead of training or delegating them to others. Ava Follower described how Adam "pretty much took that over, revamped everything,

and has been doing it himself just to make sure that everything is running smoothly, running correctly.” She also indicated that Adam had to “start counting literally heads in a room” to ensure a class could retain the capability to socially distance, and he “took a lot upon himself because ... that’s what he felt he had to do.”

Angela Follower described how Adam “doesn’t like to delegate” and “will hold everything, and get everything done, even when it’s somebody else’s task to do.” Angela indicated she would ask Adam if he needed help with the tasks, but he would respond with, “Oh, you’re too busy” and would instead work eighty-hours-a-week himself.

Amanda Follower similarly described how she would ask Adam, “What can we do to help?” while he was performing his own duties and that of Ava, yet Adam “knowing that we were also busy trying to figure out our own stuff,” wouldn’t take her up on her offer to assist.

### *University B*

#### **Barbara Leader**

Barbara Leader is the university registrar at University B. As the world became aware of COVID-19 in early 2020, Betty Subleader described how Barbara involved the leadership team in proactively planning to have the staff, “practice going remote just-in-case,” so they would be prepared if remote working became necessary.

During the pandemic, Brian Subleader indicated how Barbara “empowered us, the associates, the senior leadership team, to operate relatively autonomously. Or not

autonomously, but independently, because she knows we need to move fast.” Because the University’s response was quickly evolving and changing, Brian described how Barbara put the “trust in us to lead that decision making process” for the processes for which Brian was responsible and “to communicate with campus, to make decisions” and “without necessarily running it through her. She's not going to be a bottleneck in that process. So, she's empowered us to do that. She put the right people, uh, on the right teams in terms of pandemic response.”

Brian acknowledged prior to the pandemic response, the Registrar’s Office and other areas of the University relied on a bureaucratic approach to decision-making, “and a lot of the typical organizational barriers, you know, where you've got to go up through the reporting ranks for a decision to be made. A lot of that was really flattened down (in the pandemic response) because it had to be.”

In terms of communication, Brian described how Barbara “really engaged our entire office. She made sure everybody was aware of what was happening, what the plans were to try and lower that level of angst, you know, that everybody was feeling about the uncertainty of it all.” He compared Barbara’s communication approach to other campus offices where “they didn’t have any interaction” between the leadership or frontline staff and how Barbara’s method was very different. He acknowledged, due to the evolving nature of the situation and the University changing directions, “she couldn’t share everything” because “a decision was made, it seemed solid, and then five minutes

later, leadership would change their minds,” yet Barbara’s overall approach to communication with the Registrar’s Office “definitely was strong.”

Betty Subleader agreed with Brian Subleader’s assessment and said, “I feel like she (Barbara) communicated more with us than was communicated with her. ‘Cause as soon as she got things, we got – like, we had – sometimes in the evenings, we had to have a 10:00 p.m. conference call with all of our senior leadership team to figure out what we were gonna do the next day.” Bailey Follower, Barbara’s executive assistant, said:

Like I said, I can’t commend her enough for – for the way that she communicated. Um, it was, like I said, through email, through text, through whether it be Teams. Um, she would do meetings with the office, and we would all have like, one – one giant Zoom meeting. Um, as much as she hates to put a ton of information in an email, she would detail out, “Okay. Here’s where we’re at. This is what we’re up against.” So, even though there were things that weren’t necessarily impacting everybody in the office, she did try to keep everybody appraised and, “Okay, this is where we’re going. This is what we’re going to try to do. This is what we’re transitioning to.” So, like I said, communication was – was spectacular. She did an amazing job.

Betty Subleader, who has worked with Barbara for twenty-one years, identified having a “good working relationship” and knows if Betty needed anything “work-wise and there are resources available” she can approach Barbara. During the COVID pandemic and various workplace transitions, their work and personal relationship expanded. Betty described, “I feel like during COVID – I feel like now, we don’t talk as much work. We kind of take a little bit of a break from work ‘cause usually it’s always work, and now we kind of – with COVID, we were working so much, that now we’re back, so, like, okay, we can have a break. And – and I feel like we understand – everybody understands each other more.”

Brian Subleader asserted his relationship with Barbara and the entire leadership team grew closer during the pandemic and workplace transition, “the level of trust has grown,” and how his relationship with Barbara was more of a “peer relationship now than it was before.” Bianca Subleader agreed with Brian’s assessment and said, “in all honesty, I think the entire team got closer” because “of the expectations that were being asked” of the Registrar’s Office. Bianca said, “there were times when we were talking” after work, on Saturday, and on Sunday, “in order to accomplish what it was they were asking us to do.”

Brian provided an example of how Barbara made “deals with everybody to – to spill out into that vacant space” to ensure the safety of the staff and had “plexiglass dividers that hung from the ceiling” to make the space acceptable “from a distancing

standpoint.” Betty Subleader indicated how Barbara “didn’t have a choice” in bringing the staff back, but did a “good job communicating” with the staff and explaining the return-to-campus plans. Betty also said, “I feel that Barbara did everything within her power to communicate it and to ensure they had a safe work environment. That they were okay coming back in.”

Bethany Follower, who is not a direct report to Barbara, described how Barbara “quite frequently will tell us how much she appreciates our hard work. So, she's really good about that” and “I feel like that's an over-used phrase here, but, um, she regularly sends out updates about what's going on around the office. ‘Hey, there's new faces here. Hey, some faces are gone. There's construction across the hallway’ ... because we see those things happening, or we notice there's something – something different that we may not know why or what's going on, because we're not privy to that information in meetings, or whatever ... and she, um, does her best to share what she can, when she can.”

Bailey Follower described how Barbara, “obviously delegated a lot of tasks to leadership to get things done, she was still very much aware of her entire office. To make sure they were okay, making sure that if she couldn’t do something in particular, that somebody else could take care of it for her.” Bianca Subleader asserted how Barbara, “would communicate with us via email” to inform the staff “on the expectations of the University and what was happening with the University, you know,

as far as the expectation of us coming back to work.”

Brian Subleader described how Barbara demonstrated, “excellent leadership in navigating all that whole situation. Um, and if you needed her to – to make a decision, she made it. She would – she would tell you what she thought, um, or make a decision and when you needed it. So, access, availability when needed was good.” Betty Subleader stated Barbara would individually reach out to staff via email to “check-in on people” and how Barbara “interacted with the technology” and the “little daily things.” Betty said, “we told her somebody may be having some issues, she would reach out to them and interact with them to see, like, ‘Hey. Is there something we can do to improve your work environment right now, since you’re remote?’” Bianca Subleader agreed with the sentiment Barbara had done “an amazing job, honestly” and how “it helps us to have somebody that’s open and that keeps us abreast of what’s happening.”

*Deductive Findings: Barbara Leader*

Based on the feedback from her followers, I would assert Barbara Leader is located on Blake et al. (1981) *The Academic Administrator Grid* as a “team administration.”

Blake et al. (1981) described a “team administration” as a leader who places importance on planning and anticipating the future “by making sure that those who implement actions also have a voice in planning them.” (p. 274). An example of this occurred in early March 2020, when news of COVID-19 began to be widespread.

Barbara met with the subleaders in her office to collaborate and collectively anticipate future needs in supporting the office and the staff. Betty Subleader described how Barbara proactively requested each subleader should work with their teams to “practice going remote just-in-case,” so the staff would be prepared, in the likelihood they needed to begin remote working. In addition, multiple participants from University B, described how Barbara, during the chaos of a rapidly changing University environment, would solicit their feedback during an after-work-hours or weekend virtual meeting to plan and discuss solutions.

Another characteristic of a “team administration” is a leader who ensures he or she has team members in the correct role and organizational position that align with their talents and abilities (Blake et al., 1981). Bailey Follower described how Barbara would make sure if a staff member needed something, and it was not something Barbara could facilitate, Barbara would ensure the staff member’s issue was handled by someone with the appropriate area of responsibility or expertise. Brian Subleader’s statement regarding how Barbara empowered the subleaders, instilled trust in the subleaders to make decisions for their respective processes, and “put the right people” on the “right teams,” reinforces the assertion that Barbara is a “team administration.”

A “team administration,” as described by Blake et al. (1981), is one who communicates openly which allows for the team to exercise “self-responsibility.” In the case of Barbara, many participants lauded her for her approach to communication during

the pandemic, how she kept everyone up-to-date with the various changes, and utilized different communication approaches – email, Zoom, and Teams – to reach the staff and keep them informed. Bianca Subleader described how Barbara would reinforce “the expectations of the University” regarding their potential plans about the return to campus.

*Inductive Findings: Barbara Leader*

Theme One: Concern for Staff.

A consistent theme that emerged from the followers of Barbara Leader was her concern for the staff of the Registrar’s Office in making sure they were taken care of during the various workplace transitions. Whether it was reaching out to staff to check to make sure they were doing okay, providing consistent updates regarding the expectations of the university, or ensuring the subleaders were empowered to make decisions for their areas of responsibility, through the lens of her follows, Barbara demonstrated care and concern for her team. Another example that aligns with Barbara’s concern for her staff was described by multiple participants about how Barbara made “deals” to negotiate the usage of extra office space to allow the staff to socially distance upon their return to campus.

Theme Two: Delegation.

Another consistent inductive theme that emerged from Barbara’s followers was related to her delegation of tasks and authority. Two examples of Barbara’s approach to

delegation were shared by Bailey and Brian. Bailey Follower described how Barbara was successful in delegating tasks to her leadership team while Brian Subleader acknowledged how Barbara empowered and delegated decision making to them. In addition, Brian shared how the Registrar's Office was able to morph and adapt to meet the demands of the rapidly changing environment by "flattening out" the organizational structure. This flattening of the organization, reinforces the inductive finding that Barbara utilized delegation during the pandemic to make and share the decision making.

### **Betty Subleader**

Betty Subleader, a senior associate registrar, has three assistant registrars who report to her. The assistant registrars, in turn, have multiple staff members who report to them. One of Betty Subleader's direct reports, Brandon Subleader, was interviewed and described how Betty helped outline work-from-home plans for his staff because he "was out at the start of COVID, and she kind of helped get my team situated."

In terms of communication during the various workplace transitions, Brandon described how Betty communicated exceptionally well in planning the various transitions. He indicated "when something big would happen ... especially if it involved graduation, of course, she would call me immediately" to keep him informed of the possible changes and to discuss approaches for resolution.

Because Brandon was a first-time supervisor in the Office of the Registrar, he relayed how Betty Subleader provided coaching to assist him in having conversations

with staff who were reluctant to come back to campus. He said, “that was a big help having those kind of sometimes difficult discussions with someone about why we have to back in, even though it is a pandemic, and just kind of how to approach it and what – what to say and what not to say.”

Brandon described how he viewed Betty as a mentor, and how she continues to provide coaching and guidance upon the return to the office. Brandon stated, “I know I can definitely go to her with anything about ‘How do I approach this issue?’ or ‘This situation with an employee?’ ‘Or not an employee, but someone outside our office?’” Brandon indicated that Betty would provide feedback based upon her previous experience in the Office of the Registrar in discussing options and collectively “figuring out” how to proceed.

#### *Deductive Findings: Betty Subleader*

A limitation of this deductive finding is that only one of Betty Subleader’s direct reports chose to participate in this study. However, when reflecting upon the perceptions about Betty Subleader, from the perceptions of Brandon Subleader, I would classify Betty as a “team administration.” A “team administration” approach is to “achieve full participation of members, pursuing common goals and objectives that integrate both personal and institutional perspectives” (Blake et al., 1981, p. 237). Betty’s professional mentorship of Brandon, in navigating how to lead a team, demonstrated Betty’s commitment to Brandon’s personal goal to be a manager in the Office of the Registrar.

The mentorship also supported the institutional goal for the Registrar’s Office to provide various services to the campus community. Through Betty’s coaching of Brandon, he was able to successfully lead his team, so the team could accomplish their goals in support of the University.

*Inductive Findings: Betty Subleader*

Theme One: Personal Support.

When organizations and businesses began shutting down in March 2020 to control the spread of COVID-19, those individuals who relied on their workplace for social and human interaction were impacted. Brandon Subleader, who lived alone and was a follower of Betty Subleader, described how he relied on Betty for personal support during the pandemic. He asserted being isolated was “the hardest part” of remote working, yet Betty would call to talk about something work related, which “would turn into an hour-long conversation about something else.” He said:

We kind of got closer during COVID because we were some of the few in the office that were working at home, and we were alone. Um, most people, you know, have a significant other or children or something. Um, I had some of my team that had just gone home to be with their parents. Um, so we did a lot of just kind of – I would call with questions and end up – just we’d just talk awhile.

So, I think that really helped us to get through that part, um, because we were one of the few of our office where we were actually at home isolated alone.

Um, so I think that kind of set us up for when we came back just being in a really good spot because we were up-to-date on each other and what we were doing.

Brandon described how this personal interaction with Betty made remote working and lack of human interaction more bearable. He stated his and Betty's personal and professional relationship grew during remote work, which he attributed to them having worked together for twelve years "leading up to COVID ... set us up for success."

### **Brian Subleader**

Brian Subleader, an associate registrar in the Office of the Registrar, is a direct report to Barbara, the university registrar. Brian Subleader supervises two assistant registrars, who also have teams of staff whom they oversee. Similar to Betty Subleader, only one of Brian Subleaders direct reports was interviewed as part of this research study.

Assistant Registrar Belle Subleader, described her relationship with Brian Subleader as a collegial, good working relationship, and "is someone that has always had my back." Belle and her team were responsible for assigning classrooms to faculty members and also making changes to the course schedule during the various class modality changes. During the height of the pandemic, Belle relayed, "there was a lot of unknown" and "it was always really reassuring to know that, you know, if we ever had a major issue that I knew someone was there to support us regardless."

During the pandemic response and since the return to the office, Belle described how Brian Subleader was assigned additional responsibilities, so she often felt like she could not approach Brian Subleader to ask for assistance:

Yeah. I mean, not – not – not in a sense of like I can't, like I said, I can't go to him. But he's just so busy that I don't really see him. So, um, I – you know, if I need something, I can go talk to him. And he's – he's got an, uh, an open-door policy which is just great. He's there to answer any questions. But it's – he's not really checking in on – on a daily basis. He's not making sure – or, you know, that everything's okay. He's just kind of assuming that it is. And if it's not, I will say something, and we will fix it then.

Belle indicated she was, “on my own a lot more than I was, I feel like, prior to COVID,” but that the opportunity “has allowed me to grow a lot, so I don't mind it too much.” Brian Subleader encouraged Belle to “bring anything from the office home that was gonna make me feel, you know, more comfortable and a little prepared,” yet Belle did not think there was much else Brian Subleader could have done to assist her with the various workplace transitions.

#### *Deductive Findings: Brian Subleader*

Based upon the feedback from Belle Subleader, I would assert that Brian Subleader is located on *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981), as a “comfortable and pleasant administration.” Belle indicated how Brian allowed her to

lead her respective unit and how he had an “open door” policy to reach out with any questions or issues. This approach is consistent with a “comfortable and pleasant administration” as described by Blake et al. (1981) because Brian placed confidence in Belle “to be creative and to perform their activities without intervention, except for interventions that support efforts in a positive way” (p. 119).

Another characteristic Brian demonstrated regarding his “comfortable and pleasant” approach was described by Belle when she said Brian “has always had my back.” Belle took comfort in knowing Brian would support her and the team if a faculty member or academic department complained about their classroom assignments. Blake et al. (1981) described how those administrators with a “comfortable and pleasant” disposition, sought to gain the approval of others and how the “attitudes and feelings of others are of utmost importance” (p. 119). The feelings that Belle shared regarding how she viewed Brian’s support, reinforced Brian as a “comfortable and pleasant” administrator and one who is concerned about the attitudes of others.

#### *Inductive Findings: Brian Subleader*

##### Theme One: Leader and Follower Alignment.

Similar to Adam Leader from University A, an inductive theme emerging from the follower of Brian Subleader, was alignment between the follower and the leader in terms of their approach to work and accomplishing tasks. Belle Subleader described how she “realized what was expected of us” to rearrange the course schedule for the

upcoming registration period and “that we needed to get it done.” Belle put aside her personal opinions and feelings about remote working because “we had a job to do.” When transitioning back into the office, Belle described how Brian would offer assistance, “What can I do to help if you need help?” yet she did not rely much on Brian for support because she already knew what needed to be done.

### **Bianca Subleader**

Bianca Subleader, an associate registrar, oversees the curriculum services unit of the Registrar’s Office and has a team of six staff that report to her. Bianca Subleader reports directly to Barbara, the university registrar at University B. Only one of Bianca’s followers participated in this research study.

In early March of 2020, Bianca Subleader gave her teams a “heads up” about possible remote working and asked them to bring in their personal computers “to see if they’re going to work from a remote standpoint.” Bonnie Follower, one of Bianca Subleader’s followers, indicated how this planning was helpful “because had we not done that, I think I would’ve been lost. I don’t even know how I would’ve known how to even connect remotely.”

In terms of communicating and interacting with the team, Bonnie Follower described how Bianca Subleader kept the team informed of “everything that is going on” during the various work transitions and remained consistent “even though we were working remotely, she was still giving us updates.” Bonnie Follower asserted her

relationship with Bianca Subleader was very “one-on-one” with “consistent reporting to her” and “keeping her (Bianca Subleader) in the loop.” During remote working, Bonnie Follower indicated she communicated with Bianca Subleader via Teams and how Bianca Subleader assisted with Bonnie’s transition back to campus while Bonnie was on maternity leave.

Bianca Subleader was described by Bonnie Follower as being “very understanding” with the staff in her unit and Bianca Subleader “reached out” to check-in and “make sure that all of us weren’t having issues on a daily basis.”

*Deductive Findings: Bianca Subleader*

Upon review of the perceptions shared by Bonnie Follower, about her leader, Bianca Subleader, it is difficult to deduce where Bianca is located on *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981).

One example Bonnie provided regarding the team had “constant reporting” to Bianca and how the team would “consult Bianca on” various curricular services issues, could give the impression that Bianca provided an “authority-obedience administration” approach to leading her team. Blake et al. (1981) described “authority-obedience” as an administrator who makes “sure that others follow the proper course toward achievement” (p. 81). In this example, Bonnie indicated how they included Bianca in “different situations,” so Bianca was “kept informed” of “everything that is going on.” This example may indicate that Bianca is an “authority-obedience” leader. However,

other examples that Bonnie Follower provided indicate Bianca Subleader may take a “comfortable and pleasant” approach to leadership by the way she expressed concern for her team and communicated with them, prepared the team for the potential of remote work, and how Bianca “moved” Bonnie’s belongings while Bonnie was out on maternity leave and assisted with Bonnie’s transition back into the office.

Blake et al. (1981) asserted when applying *The Academic Administrator Grid* to administrators each leader has a “basic approach (which) resembles one” of the different identified leadership styles (p. 15). In the case of Bianca, it is difficult to determine where on *The Grid* she is located. I would assert the reason for this is because there was only one follower from Bianca’s team, Bonnie Follower, that chose to participate in the research study, and Bonnie’s responses did not provide enough data elements to deduce Bianca’s leadership approach.

### **Brooke Subleader**

Brooke Subleader, an assistant registrar at University B, supervises two staff members and is responsible for conducting the enrollment reporting to federal agencies on behalf of University B. Similar to the other Subleaders included from University B, only one of Brooke’s followers chose to participate in this research study.

Bethany Follower, who is a member of Brooke’s team, described how she “lucked out, and probably got one of the best managers in my office” when detailing her relationship with Brooke Subleader. Bethany indicated Brooke is “really great about

explaining things” and how they brainstorm together when problem solving “and we have to figure out why” a particular issue presents itself. Bethany Follower described Brooke Subleader as, “always very open to possibilities” and is great “helping you understand something” when some sort of error or discrepancy appears in the data and reports.

Bethany indicated her work is very cyclical and her engagement with Brooke “when we’re in the office, where I may not really see her, except to say ‘Hi’ or to say ‘Hey, I’m working on this’” would ebb-and-flow based upon the projects and tasks Bethany Follower was working to complete. Before the COVID pandemic, during remote work, and now since the return to the office, Brooke Subleader’s staff has two weekly meetings which are facilitated “in whatever capacities were available at the time.” Bethany Follower revealed how remote working did make having a quick conversation with Brooke Subleader more difficult and training a fellow staff member was challenging during the workplace transitions.

Bethany detailed how Brooke was “really great in general” and how Brooke helped Bethany’s transition to remote working by offering feedback and assistance on navigating the various changes. In addition, Brooke connected Bethany with someone who could help Bethany set-up her MacBook for remote work and wanted to make sure that Bethany was okay personally and professionally with the transitions.

### *Deductive Findings: Brooke Subleader*

Bethany Follower's shared perceptions about Brooke Subleader indicated Brooke is located on *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981), as a "team administration." As described by Bethany Follower, Brooke's approach to involving her team in brainstorming and problem solving are consistent with a "team" administrator because Brooke's team works together to "review the whole picture ... and formulate a sound model from start to completion" (Blake et al., 1981, p. 237). When the team experienced anomalies in the enrollment reporting data, Brooke Subleader involved the team in the review of the issues, and they collectively determined the best approach forward.

Another attribute of a "team administration" is one who seeks to "remove roadblocks." Bethany Subleader's description of how Brooke connected Bethany with someone who could assist in solving her technology issues, removed the "roadblock" that Bethany was experiencing.

### *Conclusions: Research Question #1*

The first research question sought to determine the role leaders, within the Office of the Registrar, played in fostering effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis was conducted through the lens and perceptions of the followers within the Registrar's Office. Followers were asked to describe the role their leader played in transitioning to remote work, the engagement and communication they had with their

leader, to indicate what their leader did exceptionally well during the various workplace modifications, and if their personal views on their leader shifted or adjusted during the pandemic.

Based upon the perceptions of their followers, *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981), was applied to each of the leaders to determine where on *The Grid* the leaders were located. Of the leaders and subleaders that participated in this study, and based upon their followers' perceptions, I found the following two Blake et al. (1981) leadership approaches for the majority of the leaders: “comfortable and pleasant administration” and “team administration,” but was unable to deduce where on *The Grid* one leader was located.

These two leadership approaches demonstrated by the leaders within the Office of the Registrar - “comfortable and pleasant administration” and “team administration” – are consistent with the literature regarding leadership in the time of crisis. Dirani et al. (2020) described the leadership traits of flexibility, engagement with staff, decisiveness, honesty and transparency, promotion of self-care, and demonstration of resilience, as characteristics of successful leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. As perceived by their followers, the leaders of the Office of the Registrar, demonstrated these characteristics. Through the interview process, the participants provided specific examples regarding their leaders open and transparent communication; how the leaders “checked-up” on the staff during the various transitions; the approach of the leaders in

providing a flexible environment; and the leader's demonstration of resiliency and hard work during a difficult work transition.

There is little to no research related to follower perceptions of their leader on *The Academic Administrator Grid*, Blake et al. (1981); therefore, this study is needed to provide relevant research on the role of the leader in dealing with unplanned change.

In conducting an inductive analysis regarding the perceptions of followers about the role their leaders played in the effectiveness of the Office of the Registrar, I discovered themes related to leader and follower alignment; leaders taking on tasks; concern for staff; delegation; and personal support. These findings are also consistent with the literature regarding the shift to remote work which "will force institutions to make many revisions to the processes of their work" (Miller, 2021, p. 90). Similarly, the literature indicated in times of unplanned change, crisis can be positive by creating opportunities for process improvement and changing organizational approaches (Knowles & Saxberg, 1988).

**Research Question #2: What were the self-perceptions of leaders, in the Office of the Registrar, of their role(s) in fostering employee effectiveness during change (crisis)?**

To answer research question two regarding the self-perception of leaders in fostering employee effectiveness during COVID-19, I asked the leaders within both University A and B about their roles in facilitating the various transitions and leading

their teams during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions were focused on the leader's professional relationships with their team, the leader's reflection on what they did exceptionally well during the pandemic, any changes the leader would have made or done differently with their COVID-19 response, and to provide examples of how they supported their team during the transitions.

Defining the leader for University A was clear – there was one person to whom all the staff in the Office of the Registrar reported – the university registrar. Determining the leader for University B, was not as obvious. Due to the hierarchal nature of University B, the leadership across the Office of the Registrar was disbursed to multiple subleaders. Upon talking with each of the participants from University B, the majority of subleaders and followers aligned with the person in a leadership position closest in power distance. However, after peer debriefing, I decided to proceed with recognizing one leader for University B. This decision was based upon the assertion that regardless of the hierarchal structure of University B across multiple subleaders, there was one leader – the person who held the “university registrar” title and position.

Based upon the responses of the leader from both University A and University B, a deductive analysis was conducted based upon *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981) to determine the leadership styles of both Adam Leader and Barbara Leader related to their self-perception of how they fostered employee effectiveness during change. Similar to what was identified by their followers, I identified the self-

perceived leadership styles of Adam Leader as a “comfortable and pleasant administration” and Barbara Leader as a “team administration” on *The Academic Administrator Grid* (Blake et al., 1981).

*University A: Adam Leader*

Adam Leader has worked at University A as the university registrar for approximately six years. In his interview, he discussed many of the process and policy transitions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact on the Office of the Registrar, and the followers in the office related to the task and processes they perform. He described the changes the office had to make, the implementation of new processes, and how he personally took on many of the responsibilities of the administrative specialist position to ensure the appropriate changes were implemented and done correctly.

In addition to the implementation of new processes and procedures during the initial pandemic response, the Registrar’s Office became responsible for ensuring there was appropriate social distancing in the classrooms and faculty members did not allow too many students to register for a class than the classroom would hold. He explained:

For students, in terms of going into classrooms and looking at the number of students in the spaces and everything else -- Previously, those paper cards would have just gone to the specialist. She would process the adds, and drops, and those kinds of things. But with the move to electronic and because of the health and safety considerations, I was then overseeing that process too, um, because they

wanted to make sure that basically there was nothing, you know, going wrong in those regards. Like that we were doing everything exactly as it should be. I think it became more of a... I don't know. I guess for lack of a better term, it's more of a control piece at that point. It was just wanting to make sure that everything was done exactly right. And we didn't want to be out of compliance in any certain way. And so, um... some of those responsibilities in that regard just shifted to me. And so, it was just kind of taking on those extra things to make sure it was all done correctly.

Adam also described how he led the effort to move from paper-based add/drop cards to an online petition process and was able to create the online processes via Adobe Sign. Because the administrative position was the “front-line” for providing service to students, supervised the student workers, and processed the paper-based forms, Adam reflected how this position experienced the largest change to her role during the various workplace transitions. “The traffic coming into the office, of course, that wasn't happening, at least during that time -- You know, gone home then, right? And so – but even once we returned – and it was only partial students last year because we still had some students attending online classes last year. Then, the traffic was way down.” Adam described how the processes that he “took on” from the student records specialist during the initial pandemic response, he is slowly transitioning back.

Adam indicated for Amy Follower, associate registrar, and Angela Follower,

assistant registrar, their day-to-day responsibilities stayed the same and how they “handled” their duties during the workplace transitions, as they did pre-pandemic. Adam never had to worry about whether they were taking care of what needed to be done:

They just went out and did it. You know, they – they all adapted so well. And they just did exactly what they were supposed to do, and nothing ever fell off. It was just never a concern for me. I mean, it was a concern for me going into it, but once everything started, and I just saw how things were going, I was like, “This is awesome. Like this is still working.”

A consistent assertion from Adam Leader was how he provided autonomy and independence for the associate registrar and assistant registrar to make the changes they felt needed to be made for the processes for which they were responsible. He said, “You know, it was – it was allowing everyone that-that own freedom to make those decisions and how they wanted to make certain things work. And so long as it makes sense. That’s always a thing within our office, is we just have to make sure things make sense. Make sure it’s consistent.” Adam indicated he is “not a micro-manager with them at all because I know they know what they’re doing, and they’re good at what they do. So, it’s just one of those things where we just coexist very peacefully.”

During the height of the working from home arrangements, Adam initiated a staff rotation so all staff members were not in the office at one time. The rotation consisted of the student records specialist being in the office every day with the professional staff –

registrar, associate registrar, and assistant registrar – each rotating on a separate day into the office. He did recognize the human interaction was missing from the team during this time:

I think the biggest piece that people missed from just in person life is just the interaction. You know, it really is just the bouncing off of ideas. Um, just, you know, the water cooler talk. The whatever it is. It's just popping in, "Hey, how's it going?" "Going well." "Oh my gosh, did you hear this? And this is what this department is doing now." You know, you have more of that when you're in person. So, as great of job as people did in-in completing their work and doing everything while they were at home, um, that piece was just kind of the missing filler piece.

In March of 2020, Adam described how the office staff met frequently via Zoom to ensure all of the appropriate and necessary changes were being implemented. Gradually, however, the virtual meeting frequency decreased and returned to the once-a-week meeting cadence that was in effect before the pandemic. Upon return to the office in July 2021, one change Adam initiated was to hold the office staff meetings outside to allow the staff to talk mask-free and "feel more like ourselves."

Adam indicated there are great staff members in the Registrar's Office, "everything just works really well," and the unit gets "along with each other really well." He described how the team usually "bounce(s) ideas off of each other" when making a

change and how everyone really respects each other. He praised the staff in the Office of the Registrar and indicated “they’re very good at what they do” and they have his “absolute full and total trust in everything that they do because they’re good at it.”

Adam stated how during the height of the pandemic the staff was “maintaining that production,” he never had to “go back in and push people or really like follow-up on those things” and he “never heard anything from other faculty, or staff, or anyone that anything was falling off whatsoever.” Adam attributed the consistent service provided by the Registrar’s Office to the functionality and effectiveness they experienced pre-pandemic. “I think from what I’d said initially, just the department working really well together, you know, the pieces just kind of fitting together. And-and that was the case beforehand, and I think that-that really went a long way to when we faced adversity.”

Adam recognized there was both a “good and bad” element of returning to the office, yet recognized University A required all staff to be back in the office by July 2021. A self-proclaimed introvert, Adam volunteered his preference was working from home, and he enjoyed the time being able to work from home:

I think for the two introverts, um, it was pretty nice. And, you know, I think that was something that, um – I personally enjoyed it. I liked being able to work from home. Kind of going back to what I had talked about before with a – you know, you’re just dealing with people. And a lot more. And that’s kind of for good or bad. Um, you know, sometimes you get a lot of, uh... I guess sometimes you get

your bucket filled by it, and sometimes, boy, it, you know – you really struggle with it because some people aren't as fun to deal with.

### **Deductive Themes: Adam Leader**

Based upon Adam's shared self-reflection and perception of how he facilitated employee effectiveness during change, I would assert that Adam Leader is located on *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981), as a "comfortable and pleasant administration." This assertion is consistent with the themes identified when interviewing Adam's followers – Angela, Amanda, and Ava.

Blake et al. (1981) assert that a "comfortable and pleasant administration" is one who has low concern for production and high concern for acceptance. The statement from Adam regarding how he never had to "follow-up on those things" or "never heard anything from other faculty, or staff, or anyone that anything was falling off whatsoever" provided the impression that Adam was not overly concerned with the production of the Registrar's Office. In addition, Adam's description of his approach to management by allowing the followers the autonomy and freedom regarding their responsibilities because "they're good at what they do" is indicative of a "comfortable and pleasant administration" as described by Blake et al. (1981).

Another indicator of how Adam sought acceptance from his team was highlighted by combining the perceptions of Adam and overlaying them with the

feedback received from his followers. A key inductive finding through the lens of Angela Follower, Amanda Follower, and Ava Follower, regarding their relationship with Adam, was the alignment in their approach to workplace tasks and responsibilities. Amanda described how she was a “very independent person” who did not need “a lot of interaction” from her supervisor unless “there’s a specific reason for it.” Because Adam’s approach to leading the office was in alignment with what his followers needed and expected, Adam was able to obtain acceptance from the followers, which enhances Adam’s position as “comfortable and pleasant administrator” on *The Academic Administrator Grid*.

Another key characteristic of someone on *The Grid* as being “comfortable and pleasant” is an administrator who seeks “togetherness” for the team and for the followers to feel like they are part of “one big happy family” (Blake et al., 1981, p. 14). Adam reinforced the approach to have a “happy family” in the Office of the Registrar, through his comments about how the staff in the office “just co-exist(s) very peacefully” and get “along with each other really well” which set the team up for success when they “faced adversity.”

#### *University B: Barbara Leader*

Barbara Leader, a twenty-five-year employee of University B, described the pandemic transition and impact on the Office of the Registrar in relationship to the role of the academic policy changes, the changes the office had to facilitate, and the impact

on the team. She detailed how she would hear about potential changes the University was considering making during the pandemic response and would gather her leadership team to discuss possible impact to their respective processes. She described, “I would hear the latest, like, ‘This is what they’re discussing at – in the Provost Office at the administrative level, and let’s quickly talk about what this means for us.’ And then, you come back with feedback, and then you wait to find out what the decision is.”

To support students during the pandemic, the University B leadership decided to make modifications to the course schedule and course modalities, host additional commencement ceremonies, and provide leniency to students for certain academic policies. The Registrar’s Office was responsible for the implementation and application of many of these modified processes and policies. Barbara described how she involved the leadership team in the Office of the Registrar in determining how to approach the rapidly changing institutional requests:

I’m certainly not an island. I – you know, I have a leadership team, and they were – they were involved in doing a lot of that work, and there was a lot of collaboration that had to happen. You know, it sort of just became this COVID response think tank when it came to our responsibilities, because the drastic way in which our work was having to change was such that, you know, you couldn’t put on any one person, you know, the responsibility for thinking through those changes, and the impacts, and the implementation.

During the initial work transition initiated by the pandemic, Barbara discussed how her communication methods changed to a virtual format, she communicated more frequently with the team, and the importance she placed on communicating with the Registrar's Office staff. She continued to host a session called "Reggie Chat" with her team and led "group Zooms" to "tell them what I knew was happening, what things I had heard were being discussed, possible policy changes that were coming." In addition to the office-wide communication, Barbara described how she communicated frequently with the associate registrars on her team via any mode available:

And I will tell you, during COVID, especially during remote, I was constantly in communication with my associates. I mean, just always, um, whether it was in Teams, on chat, through texts, whatever it is. And it's funny, because we have been – gotten subpoenaed for all of our conversations about how – how COVID policy came about. Um, and it was like, well, yeah, there's stuff on my phone. Yeah, there's stuff on my iPad. Yeah, there's stuff on my laptop. There's stuff everywhere, because it was just constant conversation, um, in any way possible.

Barbara acknowledged one of the biggest challenges faced during the pandemic response was "trying to balance the need to be flexible with people with equity" as some staff were "dealing with different home situations" regarding childcare, resource availability, and homeschooling. She described the need to check on staff members

without being too intrusive and relayed a story of how she texted a staff member who had a sick child to check in to see how the child was feeling. Barbara acknowledged the staff member “kinda freaked out” because “you don’t want your boss’s boss or your boss’s boss’s boss” checking up on you.

Barbara stated how “bringing people back as quickly as possible and fighting for resources” were two of the best things she did during the various pandemic-related changes. When faced with questions from her team regarding their return to the office, Barbara explained, “Hey, we’re a service organization. There’s an expectation that we are there to provide services.” She compared the decision to return to campus quickly to other offices on the University B campus, and asserted “not having that extended absence period really did kinda help with continuity, because there was just a brief period” of when the Registrar’s Office staff was not working on the campus.

When planning for the return of the staff to the office, Barbara was concerned with ensuring the staff was safe. To facilitate social distancing, she was able to negotiate the usage of empty space to allow the staff to “spread out” across multiple office spaces within the same building. She communicated information to the Registrar’s Office staff regarding the return to campus via officewide emails to explain how the office would be cleaned twice a day and there was plexiglass being placed in the open areas to create physical barriers between the cubicles.

Then, of course, you know, just risk assessment and – and everything that

you do in – in putting people’s safety first. Even with my staff, you know, there was a lot of – we got very lucky because this happened to coincide with a time when we had a lot of vacancies in our building. Um, a group had just moved out of the suite that’s right above us. It’s basically an identical footprint to our office and the office next to us.

And so, we actually called everyone back to the office as early as we possibly could, because we basically dropped our office to less than 50% capacity because we could spread everybody out. We were actually able to use the vacant spaces. So, we started working from home in spring break of, uh, 2020, and we were back 100% in the office by July.

Upon the return to the office, Barbara indicated some of the staff “loved their temporary assignment” because they were assigned to a window cubicle or had a “different, bigger spaces to themselves.” She also described how the office returned to being “fairly normal” and indicated the office hosted its staff “summer gathering” and various other “events.” She said the “masks highly recommended policy” caused some uncertainty yet viewed her role as leading by example to wear a mask. Barbara delegated the ability to make any sort of staff exception to the senior leadership team in the Registrar’s Office as they were “closer to their staff” and “were more familiar with their circumstances.”

Barbara discussed the importance of trusting her employees to make decisions about their self-care and to encourage healthy behaviors when dealing with illness and COVID exposure. She described her philosophy was to “trust in your staff, and you believe in them and the work they do, you have to give them the benefit of the doubt and – and just be there for them. And in my experience, you know, empowering them and trusting them will yield you far better results than just looking for ways that things can be exploited.” She described how she had to set a good example by telling them to take care of themselves, “value their health,” to establish clear expectations, and inferred she had to “walk the walk” by following the same advice when she or others on the leadership team were feeling unwell.

In addition to the various pandemic-related changes, Barbara described how other changes within University B, including an organizational realignment for other units within the institution as well as the creation of a one-stop student center, have impacted the staff within the Registrar’s Office.

It’s hard to say what – it’s hard to isolate what COVID impacted, because there’s so many other things going on at the same time. And so, it was just sort of that became our new normal as we’re always responding and reacting to something that’s happening, and we just kind of have accepted we’re not gonna go back to, you know, any kind of – I don’t know, comfort level of monotony or however you’d want to refer to it. But it’s just sort of those expect the unexpected, because

we're starting to see, like, you know, anything's possible at this point, good, bad, or otherwise.

During the various pandemic-related changes as well as the other University changes, Barbara described how she was “lucky enough to be part of a group of university directors” who “really came together to support each other.” She described how she received support from others within the institution because they were dealing “the same exhaustion and the same trying to – trying to manage everything.” This interaction also made Barbara more thankful and reflective on the staff she had in the Registrar’s Office. She said,

And I know I was lucky, because – why I know I had it so easy and my staff did so well is because I heard some of the stories in these other – these other units, and it was like, I’m – I’m really lucky I don’t have to deal with that. And – and, like I said, that’s just kind of how I know where my staff is, um, relative to some of these other groups.

### **Deductive Themes: Barbara Leader**

Based upon Barbara’s self-reflection and perception of how she facilitated employee effectiveness during change, I would assert that Barbara Leader is located on *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981), as taking a “team

administration” leadership approach. This assertion is consistent with the findings and perceptions of Barbara’s followers regarding her “active participation” and “commitment to standards of excellence,” indicators of a team leader (Blake et al., 1981, p. 236).

Blake et al. (1981), indicated a “team administration” is one who openly communicates and “desires to contribute to institutional success and is committed to involving those with whom he or she works” (p. 236). The example Barbara provided regarding collaborating with her leadership team to make decisions, in supporting organizational objectives, reinforced Barbara’s position in facilitating a “team” approach to leading the Registrar’s Office. Also, her method to communicating with the entire Registrar’s Office via Zoom, in email, and text messaging, also supports Barbara’s leadership orientation.

A “roadblock” the Office of the Registrar encountered was having enough office space to socially distance upon their planned return to campus. To remove the roadblock, Barbara facilitated and obtained additional office space for the Registrar’s Office staff, so they could “spread out” to mitigate any potential risk of COVID-19 exposure while in the office. The removal of barriers and roadblocks are characteristics of a “team administration” leadership approach.

### *Conclusions: Research Question #2*

The second research question focused on the self-perception of leaders in fostering employee effectiveness during COVID-19. The two leaders – Adam Leader, university registrar at University A, and Barbara Leader, university registrar at University B, were asked about their professional relationships with their team, reflection on what they did exceptionally well during the pandemic, changes they would have made or done differently with their COVID-19 response, and examples of how they supported their team during the workplace transitions.

Based upon the responses of Adam and Barbara, I conducted a deductive analysis reflecting upon *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981) to determine the leadership styles related to their self-perception of how they fostered employee effectiveness during change. Like what was identified by their followers, I identified Adam Leader as a “comfortable and pleasant administration” and Barbara Leader as a “team administration” (Blake et al., 1981).

These findings are consistent with previous literature about the self-perception of leaders regarding their leadership style. Zafar (2011) found a majority of respondents perceived themselves to approach leadership from a team management style with some perceiving themselves to have a “country club” leadership approach. This research was deduced based upon the original Blake and Mouton’s (1964) *Managerial Grid*, yet is a

relevant comparison to the current study, as it demonstrates a consistent location on *The Grid* regarding the self-perception of leaders.

When applying these findings to literature about leading during time of crisis, the leadership characteristics Adam and Barbara demonstrated are consistent with effective leadership during unexpected events. Koehn (2020) described historical successful leaders as those who were lauded for their honesty, recognition of people's fears, providing purpose, changing direction as new variables and situations were introduced, and demonstrating empathy and care. In the case of Adam Leader and Barbara Leader, each in their own way, portrayed these leadership characteristics during the COVID-19 pandemic and workplace response.

**Research Question #3: How did COVID-19 impact the Office of the Registrar and the ability of the followers and leaders to cope with the crisis situation?**

As we have all experienced, the initial and continued impact of COVID-19 uprooted our sense of normality and the impact of those changes continue to be felt across many organizations. Introduced out of necessity, the pandemic presented new challenges and opportunities specifically for both the leaders and followers within the Office of the Registrar at institutions across the United States. As they transitioned to remote working, new ways of engaging, interacting, and serving the campus community were implemented to deal with the crisis situation and forced change.

To answer the third research question, regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the Office of the Registrar and ability of the followers and leaders to cope with the crisis situation, I completed an iterative process of data review, made notes regarding repeated participant thoughts, and clustered participant ideas into different themes. This review and reflection occurred over several days to ensure my familiarity and understanding of the data and included discussion with a peer debriefer to solicit feedback and input.

After completing the iterative review and analysis of the data from University A and University B, eight inductive themes were uncovered which included (1) the impact of communication, (2) fulfillment of basic technological needs, (3) workload and work/life balance, (4) employee performance during the pandemic, (5) process change, (6) perceptions regarding staying remote or returning to the office, (7) team strength and compassion, and (8) lack of social interaction.

#### *Theme One: Impact of Communication*

A central theme shared by participants from both University A and University B was the impact on their internal office communication and collaboration during remote working. They also described new virtual ways of communicating introduced to meet the needs of their team.

Follower participants from University A acknowledged communication was more difficult during the pandemic and how their engagement with their leader decreased. For both follower and leader participants from University B, they too

acknowledged an impact on their ability to work effectively during remote working, which improved upon their return to campus.

### **University A**

Before the pandemic, Amanda Follower described how she was able to communicate with her leader to “just pop in the doorway, ask him if he has a second, you know, tell him about something that just came up.” During COVID and remote working, this was more difficult because “we weren’t in the same place at the same time.” Similarly, Angela Follower described how she would prefer talking with someone face-to-face versus phone or chat and how pre-COVID, it was easier to “get up, walk down the hallway, you know, ask him a question, or you know, bring up a scenario, you know, ‘What do you think about this?’ During COVID, when we were all working from home, that was a little more awkward to do. Right?”

The followers from University A described the usage of various chat platforms to interact and engage with other another and with their leader. Amanda Follower described how they would send chat messages among the group, and that the electronic chatting became the centralized communication method while working from home. Not being able to see each other to know whether or not she was interrupting caused Amanda to pause when deciding whether or not to reach out via chat. “My take on it was when you’re not all in the same place, you don't know if you’re interrupting somebody. If I could see him, I know if I’m interrupting, I wouldn't interrupt.”

Ava Follower appreciated having office meetings with her co-workers during the pandemic because it allowed for the team to:

catch-up with our personal – like, you know, what’s going on in your world and what’s going on with you, and then, yes, we would end up talking about what’s needing to be done, you know, as far as the office is concerned. So, having those meetings during that time kind of still kept us connected. You know, we were able to be aware of how our colleagues were doing at home, you know, what issues they had.

There was an element of disconnect regarding communication between the leader and the followers of University A. Adam described how from his perspective:

the communication was amazingly good just because of chat features. I mean, everyone was just constantly just chatting each other back and forth. And it probably got to a point where we were – we communicated even more, in a way, if that makes sense, because chatting was so easy. As opposed to – you don’t always want to pop in someone’s office. It’s much easier just to type in, “Hey, what about this?” And so ... so, the communication was constantly there.

Both Amanda Follower and Angela Follower’s viewpoint of the communication during the workplace transitions was different from that of Adam. Amanda Follower asserted, “during COVID, uh, there was probably less collaboration, um, and now, we’re back to being able to collaborate more in person.” Angela Follower’s perception

regarding the office “communication as a whole probably decreased during COVID. And the increase in using email” which Angela Follower found more difficult to provide enough context when sending an email. She also acknowledged the team did not have the same “robust conversation because, we weren’t in person, and things were much more, like, bullet point conversation, instead.”

### **University B**

Belle Subleader described the approach to communication with her team – “our relationship is a lot better when we’re here in person, and we can communicate. It’s a lot easier to communicate, I feel like, um, to get questions answered and just kinda get to know people a little bit better than on Zoom or a phone call once a day just to kinda check in.” She described an employee who excelled during the pandemic and appreciated how the staff member was “very open with me, and so I feel like I can be very open with her.” Belle also recognized “it is easier to communicate with your employees and for them to be able to communicate back with you, it just makes a world of a difference rather than trying to read her mind, you know, what she’s thinking or, you know, what’s wrong. She feels very comfortable just coming to me and kind of telling me straight up what’s – what’s going on.”

For Bethany Follower, not having face-to-face communication made it more difficult to ensure that she was “on the same page with somebody.” Before remote working, Bethany reflected on how she would walk “down the hallway” and “pop my

head around the corner and would say ‘Hey, what about this?’” And the whole conversation was less than two minutes.” During the remote work, Bethany acknowledged, “you can IM ... or you can set up a Zoom call, but that’s a lot more involved. And for a two-minute conversation, that’s a little bit overkill, I feel like.”

Brooke Subleader’s transition to remote working was difficult because communication with her leader decreased during remote working and her leader was not “checking in with me to see how things were.” Brooke identified as a people-person who needs frequent day-to-day communication and positive reassurance from her supervisor. Because Brooke Subleader’s supervisor would “disappear” at times, Brooke felt more “on my own” and did not feel supported during the various workplace transitions.

The perspective from Brian Subleader was with the Teams chatting platform, the group was “so connected all the time” and “it almost felt like we were more connected and in communication more when we were all remote and not in the same workspace. Because we had to be, right? We were just kind of, we're on there.”

Brandon Subleader’s communication during remote working, “went more, you know, text-heavy – email, chat, whatever they wanted to use,” so he could interact with his team to make sure they did not receive a tweet from University B before knowing any potential impact to them. Since the team has returned to the office, however, Brandon Subleader has found some staff, “still wanna just do that chat even though they’re six feet away from me.” Brandon indicated he instructed his team, “No, we need

to – you know, ‘Come ask me that question. I don't understand what you're asking me through chat. Let's talk this through in person.’” For his team, Brandon Subleader has encouraged the return to “somewhat normal” and to “not constantly keep our COVID communication practices in place.”

Belle Subleader indicated she, “was happy that we got to come back as early as we did” and felt being able to communicate “makes a big difference when people can get ahold of you right away.” She said the Registrar's Office was different from other offices on campus because “they know you'll pick up the phone” because a lot of other people “are not in the office or they don't have a phone to pick up. So, it's really hard to communicate with somebody.”

## **Conclusions**

Communication during the pandemic and remote working was critical for the leaders and followers of both University A and University B. For University A, prior to the pandemic, the followers enjoyed being able to “stop by” to see each other, to chat, and brainstorm collectively on issues. During remote working, however, they relied more heavily on technology-based communication and chat features to communicate within the office. There was a disconnect between the followers and the leader of University A. The followers acknowledged a decrease in the “robust conversations” and brainstorming which occurred pre-COVID, while the leader asserted that communication was “constant” and they “communicated even more” than they did pre-pandemic.

For University B, the general sentiment of the participants was that in-person communication was easier, more effective, and efficient and many expressed their happiness at being able to return to campus so they were able to communicate with their teammates face-to-face. Some followers described difficulty deciding how to contact someone during the pandemic with one subleader feeling abandoned by her leader when communication decreased. Since their return to the office, face-to-face communication has resumed for most of the team, yet some office staff rely more heavily on chat technology to communicate.

The approaches by University A and University B were consistent with the literature regarding communication during the pandemic. Weiss and Li (2020) found as organizations navigated the pandemic, it was critical for leaders to communicate frequently via different communication modalities and acknowledge to their followers how decisions may evolve.

In addition, this emphasis on connection and desire to communicate between teammates is a key component and level within Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943). The leaders and followers within the two institutions, through their face-to-face communication, felt connected and sense of belongingness with their colleagues. The acknowledgement of the participants that they missed this engagement during the pandemic reinforces their psychological need of belonging with positive colleague relationships.

### *Theme Two: Fulfilling Basic Technological Needs*

The second theme discovered was related to the fulfillment of leader and follower technological needs during the initial transition to remote working. Many participants described an initial skepticism in early 2020 regarding remote work and if their university would ever move to an online environment; however, when March 2020 hit, participants from both University A and University B described how the availability of technological resources impacted their effectiveness to do their jobs. Followers from University A struggled to obtain the necessary technological resources to work remotely in an effective manner. Conversely, followers from University B recognized their leader played a significant role in helping them obtain the appropriate technology.

#### **University A**

For University A, the transition to work-from-home technology needs was difficult. Angela Follower discussed the challenge of “lugging” a large desktop to her house so she would have a computer to utilize, but she was unable to have video conference calls because there was no camera for her computer. Angela also acknowledged how “the technology piece of it, where at the very beginning, we were kind of struggling as an institution to have the technology required to work remotely.” Amanda Follower described not having a work laptop to utilize, so she had to utilize her personal laptop and acquired a second monitor so she could perform her work more efficiently.

Ava Follower described not having internet access at home and having to work with the university information technology office to get internet at home and her cellphone “hooked up to our phone system” to allow “all the calls that would normally come into the office,” to ring on Ava’s phone “at the house.”

### **University B**

In describing the role their leader played in assisting with the transition to remote working, many followers of University B confirmed their leader played a significant role in obtaining the necessary technology and tools to utilize while working from home.

Barbara Leader described the various accommodations the Office of the Registrar made for staff including allowing staff to take home keyboards, monitors, work chairs, and stand-up desks, so they were more comfortable in their home office space. She recognized for some staff, “the change would be more challenging for them” if their working tools were different than they were accustomed to utilizing within the office.

Brian Subleader described how their Registrar’s Office leadership worked with institutional information technology staff to make Chromebooks available for the staff to utilize at their home offices and how he encouraged his staff members to establish a workspace at home similar to their on-campus office set-up.

Bonnie Follower stated her leader had the team bring in their personal laptops in early March 2020 so the information technology department could review the laptops for software needs, in anticipation of needing to work from home. She applauded the

decision of her leader, Bianca, to proactively plan the review of personal computers and indicated it was “very beneficial, because had we not done that, I think I would’ve been lost. I don’t even know how I would’ve known how to even connect remotely. It’s just something we had never – no one had ever prepared for.” Betty Subleader described how she checked-in on one of her employees who lived in her neighborhood “so I could go over there and help her if she had a tech issue.”

### **Conclusions**

The second theme discovered was related to the impact of fulfilling basic technological needs for the staff members at both University A and University B.

For University A, the participants described how at the beginning of the pandemic, they struggled to obtain the necessary computers, phones, monitors, and cameras so they would be able to work remotely. University B participants, however, shared a much different perspective. Participants described how their leader assisted in obtaining the necessary tools and allowed them to take home various office supplies, furniture, and equipment so they would be comfortable working from home. The leaders at University B also had followers start testing their laptops in early March 2020, before remote working, so the followers would be prepared in the chance the office was forced to move to a remote environment.

When reviewing these findings against literature regarding the fulfillment of needs, I would assert that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943), a concept which specifies

how people must fulfill their basic needs before fulfilling more advanced needs, reinforces this theme. In this case, the participants described how they had to first fulfill basic physiological needs (i.e., technology needed to do their jobs) during the start of the pandemic. For the participants from University A, they described the struggles they encountered in having this need fulfilled. For the participants from University B, they described how their leaders prepared and helped them to fulfill this basic need; thus, this physiological need was met soon after they began to work remotely.

*Theme Three: Workload and Work/life balance*

The third identified theme, from both leaders and followers, was related to the workload and work/life balance during remote working. This consistent theme appeared from University A and University B participants regarding how the pandemic blurred the lines between work/life and home/life. Participants discussed the initial impact of COVID and how they worked more hours than a standard workday to support their campus in the various pandemic-related changes.

Barbara Leader described the exhaustion she felt and how she had to cope with the stress, lack of sleep, and anxiety of the pandemic situation while leading the Office of the Registrar and the staff. She discussed how she started a “shift” at midnight to support their international branch campus and frequently worked with the staff multiple time zones away until the early hours of the morning determining how the academic policy changes for the main campus would be applied to the branch campus. Betty

Subleader, who was on maternity leave with a newborn baby, also discussed meeting with the branch campus in the “middle of the night” while she was taking care of her newborn. She said, “Like, I usually have phone calls and my meetings with (them) between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. So, we just continue, like, if having a baby helps that because I’m already awake now. I don’t have to set a alarm to wake-up, but my kid wakes me up, and we’re up for our meetings.”

Adam Leader discussed the impact on his work/life balance and indicated it was a constant barrage of work -- “there was never a line. Like it seemed like from daylight to bed – when you go to bed, it was like a constant – it just never stopped. And so, I do think that some lines were blurred in there as far as what those work hours really looked like.” He also shared his observations that others within the University struggled with the work/life balance as well. Amy Follower, associate registrar and follower of Adam, acknowledged her opinion of Adam shifted because of how hard he worked during the various pandemic transitions. She said, “He was working constantly.”

Brandon Subleader, who lived alone during the pandemic, described how he worked into the evenings because there was work to be done and because he lived alone, “nothing to pull” him away from the work. He also acknowledged the impact on his work/life balance was the hardest transition to make and how many days he started “working prior to just 8 a.m. and well after 5 p.m.”

Belle Subleader described working until 2 a.m. during the transition to remote

working because she and her team, “were expected to turn around a schedule in three weeks” which she described as “just insane.” She acknowledged, “we needed to get it done. But I don’t know – don’t know if there’s anything I really did that kind of was like, okay, this is gonna be easy because it wasn’t easy. It was – it was hard, and there was a lot expected of us that, you know, really isn’t – shouldn’t be expected of someone to be able to change an entire schedule in three weeks. But we did.”

Ava Follower indicated because of university policies, she was unable to take vacation for over two years because the institution did not allow anyone to take any time off. “So, I went – my first vacation was this past summer, so I had, like, two years no vacation” and was thankful when she was finally able to take a vacation in the summer of 2021.

Because she no longer had a commute during remote working, Angela Follower discussed how she worked much more because she started working earlier and worked later into the evening. “And so, I jump in, and I start working earlier than I should, and I usually stay later than I would if I was here (the office), and I use it to drive home.”

Brian Subleader described how from April to May 2020, work “became my life. I mean, I – I rarely saw my staff.” He acknowledged “he was taking too much – much of it on. And it eventually I mean, it got to where it – it – was really stressed out, and I was really fatigued. I mean, it was 12-hour day was – was the minimum for a while there, you know. It's like you just never stopped. You were always on. Weekends, it took all,

every bit of that time.”

For Brian Subleader’s staff, who typically worked a standard eight-to-five schedules before the pandemic, Brian allowed his staff to have “more flexibility” to get the job done and told them, “I don’t care when you do it,” and outlined the quantity of work that needed to be accomplished and on what timeframe

Bianca Subleader indicated she would start working at 7:30 or 7:45 a.m. “and then I wouldn’t get up from my chair ‘til like 6 – 6:30.” Upon reflection, she found she was spending more time “in my chair” than she would when “in the office” and felt like she was not giving “her family, or husband, the quality of time that I – that I should have been giving him.”

## **Conclusions**

A consistent theme shared by both the leaders and followers from University A and University B was the impact COVID-19 and remote working had on their work/life balance. Many described working well before 8 a.m. and working until late at night. For some, it was due to the sheer volume of the changes they were being asked to implement, while for others, it was a way to combat the loneliness of being alone during the pandemic.

These shared perspectives of the participants are consistent with literature regarding the increased workload, added stress, depression, and anxiety that many people felt during remote working. Kaugars et al. (2022) indicated that employees who

transitioned to remote working were negatively impacted regarding their work/life balance while parents who worked from home reported higher levels of feeling overwhelmed, along with a “decreased ability to perform as parents,” in addition to experiencing an increase in anxiety and depression from pre-pandemic times (p. 142). Platts et al. (2022) found when comparing the depression and stress levels of those employees who worked from home during the pandemic compared to those who continued to work in their usual location, those who worked from home “experienced significantly higher levels of stress and depression” than those who went into the office or their usual location of work (p. 8).

#### *Theme Four: Employee Performance during COVID*

The fourth theme uncovered from both University A and University B was those followers who were good performers before the pandemic hit in March 2020, continued to flourish, while those followers who had performance issues prior to COVID, the problems persisted and were exacerbated during the various working transitions.

The leaders and followers from University A did not report any performance issues during the pandemic, and their leader, Adam, relayed his belief that because they were well-functioning before COVID-19 “hit,” performance was not impacted during the workplace transitions. Adam said:

Kind of like a marriage, right? Like you hit a speedbump. If you’re going along really well, and you’re already like doing great as a couple beforehand, you

hit that speedbump, whatever it is, you probably work through it a little bit better than if you're humming along at a three, right?

And then, you hit something big in your life. Well, guess what? You know, you're gonna have chaos. And, um, I think because we were already doing so well, I think that we were able to overcome a lot of those changes. And I think we were able to make it all work. And... and just make it through that. And I'm – I feel lucky every day for the staff that I have in terms of them being able to do these things, and work together, and just the way it's always worked out.

Similar to Adam Leader's comments, leaders from University B concurred and agreed those staff members who excelled before COVID-19, continued to thrive. Belle Subleader described a follower who was "very driven," a "hard worker, and understood what was expected of her during remote working. She said:

And so, I feel like she understood if I get my job done, then yes, I can step away, go do, you know, whatever it is at home I need to do. But I never – I never felt like I needed to check up on her on a daily basis. She, you know, I can – I can tell how much work they get done based on, you know, just looking at our different systems that, um – I just think she's just a natural driven person. And so, I really felt like worked well, um, with her at home.

Another leader at University B, Brooke Subleader, described a staff member who

handled the workplace transitions rather well -- “She had no problem with it” and was “every bit as productive from home. I mean with her there wasn’t really hardly any – there was – she didn’t miss a beat kinda thing.” Brooke Subleader attributed some of this to the “work ethic” of the staff member and how the staff member approached the work like “I’m gonna get this work done; it doesn’t really matter what, how I’m gonna have to do it, whether it’s sitting at my desk or on my computer at home, or whatever, I’m gonna get it done.”

On the contrary, Brandon Subleader indicated there were some staff members on his team who before COVID, were “not underperforming, just not (performing at the) same level as others.” He described how the “gap kind of grew a little bit virtually because they didn’t have that kind of supervision and just one-on-one in-person aspect” which “stunted their development and progression, being remote and not having that interaction as a team.”

Brooke Subleader described a staff member who struggled during the transition because “he’s just not an engager” and how Brooke had difficulty communicating with him in gauging his understanding or work product. She felt, “COVID didn’t cause it. It just intensified it, I think, or at least it intensified my feelings about it because I didn’t have a way of checking” whether the staff member was on-task.

## **Conclusions**

The fourth theme discovered was the focus on employee performance during the pandemic and remote working. Participants from both University A and University B perceived that employee performance - whether positive or negative - stayed consistent during the various workplace transitions.

For University A, participants asserted because they worked efficiently and effectively before the pandemic, their levels of performance were not impacted. For University B, participants described how those employees who were strong performers before working remotely continued to be consistent in their performance, while those who were underperforming continued to perform at their consistent lower level. A few participants did acknowledge training staff and gauging employee performance became more difficult during the pandemic.

These findings are consistent with research regarding employee performance during the pandemic. Because those employees who were strong performers continued to perform at pre-pandemic levels and those who were pre-pandemic weak performers did not regress and maintained their performance, the findings of Vo-Thanh et al. (2021) are relevant and applicable. Vo-Thanh et al. (2021) found employees who were satisfied with the COVID-19 response of their organization, adopted “positive behaviors and attitudes to maintain their job performance” (p. 918) and were more likely to feel stability in their role, organization, and trust in those around them, which in turn, created

a willingness to work hard during global pandemic.

#### *Theme Five: Process Change*

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated changes for colleges and universities to adapt and implement new ways of serving faculty, staff, and students. For University A, the participants described how the transition to remote working improved their processes and procedures and have been formally adopted upon their return to campus. For University B, the processes themselves were not affected, yet the remote environment negatively impacted their ability to train and onboard new staff members.

#### **University A**

For University A, the COVID-19 pandemic created an impetus for the institution to change paper-based to in-person processes. Each of the participants from University A discussed the changes which were necessitated during the initial pandemic response and stated many of these changes persisted and have become the new way of operating.

For example, Adam Leader spoke of a significant implemented change which involved converting the paper-based independent study process and replacing it with an on-line tool, Adobe Sign, for the electronic routing of documents. This new process allowed students to submit an independent study course form through an electronic approval workflow with the final “stop” of the workflow being submitted to the Office of the Registrar for processing. Ava Follower described how “everything was hardcopy paper” before the pandemic, and students would need to pick up a form, complete the

form, and return it to the Registrar's Office for processing. She acknowledged "since COVID happened, all that was revamped to pretty much online."

Angela Follower supported the assertion of her leader and co-worker, Amanda, and indicated moving to on-line processes was the biggest improvement for the Office of the Registrar, by stating, "all of our forms shifted to fillable PDF's, um, with the ability to digitally sign things. Um. So, that was probably the biggest change for me, personally, was the shift to all fillable forms using Adobe Sign."

Amanda Follower, the staff member responsible for certifying students for Veteran's benefits and reporting to the National Student Clearinghouse, described the biggest change to the processes for which she was responsible, was the creation of new electronic processes for students to submit the necessary information online and the development of new ways to virtually interact and meet with students requesting Veteran's benefits. Upon the return to campus Amanda acknowledged, "I had not reverted back to doing things the old way ... I feel like now, because we've got this remote capability, that, you know, with the webcams, and the video links, and everything, um, it makes me more accessible to, um, my advisees, um, or to perspective students, especially with VA things."

For Angela Follower, the biggest work shift was providing a virtual option for students needing to complete an official degree audit. Prior to the pandemic, Angela described how the students would "come into my office, we'd sit down, we'd go over

their degree plan, what they have left, what they've completed." Since the process was shifted online, Angela Follower continued to allow students the "choice between virtual and in person...I'm not forcing them (students) to come back in."

Ava Follower, which started in the Registrar's Office in the summer of 2019, described how she was "kinda sorta getting the hang of my job and my duties, COVID happened, so everything I have learned pretty much went out the window."

A positive outcome of the process improvements for University A is the new procedures have become the standard way of operating within the Registrar's Office. Adam Leader said "But, you know, during that year and a half period or whatever it was, we were making continuous adjustments to the different processes that we'd initially developed. And do, those had just continued to get better and better. So, once we returned and we – we asked each other, 'Is that working? And do we wanna keep it that way?' And it was pretty much a resounding yes for almost everything."

### **University B**

In comparison to University A, the process changes the Office of the Registrar experienced at University B were mostly related to staff training and onboarding during the various transitions. Belle Subleader discussed how a new employee was "thrown to the wolves" after having been hired during the pandemic. Training was difficult, not only because everyone was so busy and in a virtual space, but also because the changes the University was implementing were vastly different than normal processes and

procedures. Belle said, “You could take the procedures manual and throw it out the window for the most part. So, the challenge there was, she had to learn it, the pandemic way, and now she’s having to relearn all of our processes and procedures in the normal way.”

Brandon Subleader discussed the impact on the two of the staff members on his team who started shortly before the pandemic. The movement to remote work “disrupted our training production for them as far as what we taught them and when – then had to go to a virtual format which was a little more difficult.” Brandon indicated once the staff members transitioned back into the office, it made the training processes easier and the followers were more engaged with the work responsibilities and learning their jobs.

Bethany Follower described how a new teammate had joined her team just prior to the pandemic and had difficulty grasping concepts due to the lack of face-to-face interactions, which made training more difficult. She said, “When we moved into COVID times, he had only been there for maybe two cycles, um, and so, there were times when it would have been a lot easier to sit down at the same computer and say, ‘Hey, here's this, this, and this. Remember, we've done this?’”

## **Conclusions**

The Office of the Registrar at both University A and University B experienced changes related to their processes and procedures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The process changes manifested differently at the two institutions, but overarchingly, the

leaders and followers from both institutions were required to adapt and change to meet the changing demands of their respective constituents. For University A, the leaders and followers had to make changes to quickly adapt paper-based and in-person processes into procedures that could be completed remotely. For University B, the changes the leaders and followers in the Office of the Registrar faced were related to staff training, on-boarding, and how to engage with new staff in teaching them their respective job responsibilities.

As University A and University B dealt with the unplanned change the pandemic presented, they demonstrated their flexibility to adapt and adjust based upon the needs of their constituents and staff. This approach is consistent with Knowles and Saxberg (1988) who recognized how unplanned events can create stress and pressure on an organization and, in times of crisis, these events can be a positive impetus by creating an opportunity to reflect on the current organizational approaches and allocation of resources. If the organization is too rigid or inflexible, the unplanned change can be detrimental to the existence of the organization itself (Knowles & Saxberg, 1988).

*Theme Six: Return to the Office or Stay Remote?*

The sixth theme discovered was related to the feelings of the participants to return to campus or to continue working in a remote environment. The sentiments shared from the participants from University A and University B were divided based upon institution. Those participants from University A, wished to remain working remotely or

to have a hybrid working option, while those participants from University B, wanted to return to campus as quickly as possible.

### **University A**

Angela Follower described her frustration with University A and how Adam was unable to make decisions whether the employees in the Registrar's Office could work from home. She indicated, "Unfortunately, he has no power to say, 'You can work from home twice a week and work in the office three days a week.' Right? Like, his – our institution has taken a hard – they're – they're treating us very black-and-white. You're either, you are not working from home, you are not working remotely. Everybody is working in the office. No exceptions."

She stated each department should be able to "decide what works best for their department ... So, unfortunately, he (Adam) has no ability to say, 'Yes, I know this works for you.'"

Amanda Follower indicated she "was more productive when I was working at home than I am here because, so many people like, colleagues, will stop in and talk. Of course, I'm a talker, so if somebody starts talking to me, I'm going to keep going." She also indicated her frustration with having to return to campus and how the University did not allow exceptions for remote work. She said:

But, like, just this idea of, "This all never happened. Now, we're back in person and, you know, even though you did all of these things successfully, and you

were super productive, like, that's not an option. You have to be here." Whereas, we know people are getting sick, um, you might need to stay home with somebody else, or you know, you – life might be in the way, and you can do something from home.

Amanda Follower recognized Adam "is all for exercising professional judgment and common sense. Like, if – if I need to be out of the office, but I can work, then I should work."

Angela Follower described the biggest challenge for her in the return to campus is "not having the flexibility to really do what works best for me." She understands the university's approach, but indicated, "it would've been nice not" to have to come to the office every day and would have appreciated if the University would have allowed "to have these decisions made at our level" about any type of remote or hybrid working arrangement.

Ava Follower's sentiments regarding remote working varied from her coworkers, and she acknowledged the institution did its best in keeping people employed during the pandemic. She appreciated having a full-time job, that her salary was not decreased, and no one was furloughed. She said, "the fact that we were able to keep our jobs and steady and – you know, that's a blessing. So, I think that University A did, you know, their best and obviously did a really good job at, you know, making sure that their employees stayed working. You know, so I think that was – that's big."

Adam described how he “personally enjoyed it (working from home)” and asserted he “felt like people were very efficient when they were doing everything that they were doing.” Adam said, “the bad of being in-person is that people are in people’s offices talking, or they are doing things when maybe they need to be working, you know, or something like that.” Remote working allowed for the workers to focus less on the human element which “will take you out of the work element” because “at home, it was pretty much more of the work element.” Adam Leader also described how he felt “people were less stressed at home” and “people are comfortable in their own environment” rather than having to work in the office.

Bethany Follower was the lone participant from University B who acknowledged she enjoyed working from home. She said, “I actually really like it. I don't know if that's a thing I'm supposed to say. But I do enjoy working from home.” Because her job did not have any student-facing interaction, Bethany felt she could successfully complete her job at home but recognized the Office of the Registrar is a “student services office” and how the collective office needed to “be available to students.” She stated:

I think it would be really difficult to try to say, “Hey, you can stay home; hey, you have to come in the office,” that kind of thing, and parsing it out. So, um, I understand that although my position doesn’t deal directly with students in a face-to-face manner, um, it is a lot easier and more fair across the board to have everybody just come back in the office, um. Would I like to work from home? I

would love that. If I could do like a three and two split, that'd be awesome. But that's not practical.

### **University B**

For Barbara Leader, it was about establishing the expectation and tone for the Registrar's Office staff they would return to campus, because as an office, they were "creating an environment to facilitate our university's returning to normal as quickly as possible." Bonnie Follower described how she "definitely" is someone who likes "face-to-face interaction," feels she is "more efficient" on campus, "and I do better when I'm at — on campus, um, in the office."

Belle Subleader described how she was ready to come back to work and to be "talking with adults again." She said:

I really – that was I think the main thing was I struggled not having that adult interaction. My husband went back to work in May. And so, there was just me and my 5-year-old. And it was just – it was hard. So, for me, coming back was the best thing. I wanted – I wanted back there as soon as they would let me. Um, I just liked that adult interaction. I liked being out of my house not worrying about anything but work and being able to focus on work.

In addition, Belle Subleader recognized it "was beneficial to come back as early" because "for what we do in this office ... it was imperative that we came back as early as

we did ... especially with the constant change.” She indicated it was easier for her team “to communicate and to figure things out” and how they could “just do it right here and not have to go back and forth” with communicating in the various technology platforms.

Bailey Follower described how, “having people together is – gives us a sense of normalcy. And also, a sense of team.” She also acknowledged “you can’t get that when you’re working from home.” For Brooke Subleader, she “was really pushing to get everybody in the same place as far as the University would allow” so the team could engage face-to-face more.

## **Conclusions**

The sixth theme focused on the differences between University A and University B and the participants’ perspectives on whether or not they should continue working in a remote environment or return to campus and into the office.

For participants from University A, the general sentiments were unhappiness with the institutional decision which required them to return to the office. The leader and followers felt they should be allowed to have hybrid or remote working options and for the decision to be made at the Registrar’s Office level.

The majority of participants from University B shared the opposite perspective and indicated they wanted to return to campus as quickly as possible so they could interact and engage with their colleagues and provide service to students, faculty, and staff.

This difference in perspectives between the participants from University A and University B can be attributed to the acceptability of remote working as deemed part of the values of the organization and its members. Levi (2017) indicated the culture, value system, beliefs, and norms of an organization influence the sense of identity among staff and determine what is or is not acceptable behavior within the organization. Because the organizational cultures between the two organizations, University A and University B, differed before the pandemic with continued evolution occurring during remote working, these differing sentiments - whether to return or stay remote - can be attributed to the organizational value system that was already in existence.

*Theme Seven: Team Strength and Compassion*

The seventh theme emerging from University B participants was their regard for how their team “grew stronger” and sense of compassion toward each other increased during the various workplace transitions.

Bailey Follower described how she played a “minor part” in the huge undertaking the Registrar’s Office assumed to support the University community. She indicated, “considering the circumstances and what they were able to – to turn over, get it in place, put it back into place, turn it back on, turn it off” was an amazing team effort. She said, “I mean, we’ve always been a tight knit group. But it was – it was amazing to see how well everybody stepped up and – and got things done.” Bailey acknowledged how the staff was more aware “of how other people were feeling, and reaching out, and

making sure that they were okay. Because that was already established. That's, you know, that's what we do.”

Betty Subleader described how the senior leadership team of the Registrar's Office grew closer during the pandemic due to the coordination and “boots on the ground getting stuff done on a daily basis.” Another outcome is the senior leadership team now “talk every day” and “go to lunch three times a week” which has “evolved where we're – we constantly are talking and thinking of the next thing of what we're gonna do and more interactive than we were” before the COVID pandemic.

Bianca Subleader described how she had a close relationship with her team before the pandemic, but “COVID has probably brought us closer” because she is more understanding and aware of people's home lives and what was happening in the office. When the Registrar's Office staff returned to campus, Bianca Subleader asserted her team was “ready to come back” and appreciated the opportunity to temporarily occupy the empty office space, so they could maintain social distancing.

Brian Subleader indicated his relationship with his supervisor has “grown considerably” during the pandemic as has “the level of trust” between the two. In addition, his “comfort level in making larger decisions independently” has increased along with the relationship of the leadership group.

Brooke Subleader described how “within our office,” she believed the pandemic increased compassion toward each other. She said, “I think we're all more a little bit

more, compassionate about people's emotional feelings" and how, "we didn't really think about (it) before, that we probably should have." She indicated how the pandemic caused a shift in thinking, "we're thinking about people's personal health and well-being, not just the job, you know, where you wanted somebody there, unless they were on their death-bed, you're there (at work)."

### **Conclusions**

The seventh theme was only relevant to the participant experiences from University B who shared how their team grew stronger during the pandemic and demonstrated more compassion and understanding in their workplace interactions.

In considering this finding and application to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), I would assert because the lower level needs from the University B participants had already been satisfied, the leaders and followers from University B were able to progress to a higher level on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy in seeking respect and recognition from their colleagues. This fourth level, which Maslow titled "esteem," includes the concepts of self-worth, accomplishment, and respect.

In the case of University B, the participants sought to fulfill their own esteem needs - completion of work, mastery, and achievement – while also seeking esteem from their colleagues in the form of teamwork, collaboration, and respect; thus, the perception of the University B participants was their team strength increased during this time.

### *Theme Eight: Lack of Social Interaction*

The eighth theme discovered during data analysis was related to the lack of social interaction during remote working. This finding, consistent across participants from both University A and University B, described how participants missed the social interaction which occurred in an in-person work environment.

When asking participants about their adaptation to remote working or what was the biggest challenge, Angela Follower described, “for me, personally, was the lack of social interaction,” not being able to “get up and physically talk” with her coworkers on a personal level, and how “there’s a lot that is lost in translation when you email or message somebody instead of having a full conversation.” Amy Follower, a self-described “pretty social person,” faced the same struggles and indicated that the lack of social interaction “was hard for me.”

Ava Follower, who was the sole employee to be physically present in the Registrar’s Office at University A during remote working indicated, “I think that, you know, coming back into the office has been a nice change for everyone” because “during our day, we get to have a little socialization with our coworkers” which “didn’t exist when we were all remotely working from home.” Ava also described how she missed the interaction with students and how it created a “big void” while the campus was shut-down.

Adam Leader described the “water cooler talk” was the “biggest piece that

people missed from just in-person life, is just the interaction. You know, it really is just the bouncing off of ideas ... It's just popping in, 'Hey, how's it going?' 'Going well?' 'Oh my gosh, did you hear this? And this is what this department is doing now.' You know, you have more of that when you're in person."

Bailey Follower searched for a sense of team and social interaction during remote working. "There was so much going on, and so many different things that were changing, and so many different tasks that were, you know, needing to be accomplished." She described how once a week, she contacted everyone in the office, "just to see how they were doing...just because I knew that some people were, um, single people living at home, and they didn't necessarily have others in the household. And plus, you know, you – you miss the camaraderie." She also described how the staff within the Registrar's Office "developed a Facebook group just for our office so that we could communicate that way too, and post different things, and – and share different things." The team also created a COVID bingo game and had a "swag day" where Bailey Follower and others "porch dropped" give-a-ways so that everyone felt connected to each other and "could have a little something."

Brandon Subleader described how he "personally did not enjoy working from home" because he lives by himself and did not "really see anybody." He missed having people around and being able to "troubleshoot together as a team." During remote working, Barbara Leader asserted how she missed her co-workers around the office, "at

the copier,” and how she felt “happier to see people” now that the staff has returned to the office. Brian Subleader stated how when the office first began remote working, “it was cool, and then everybody wanted to come back because they missed the social interaction.”

## **Conclusions**

The final theme discovered from both University A and University B was the overwhelming sense of loss both leaders and followers felt with the lack of social interaction with their colleagues during remote working. Many participants described missing their coworkers, the “water cooler” talk, brainstorming as a team, and socializing during the day. Langvik et al. (2021) found for employees, forced to work remotely during the pandemic, “the extent to which respondents reported missing their colleagues was a significant predictor of stress” (p. 5).

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) theorizes how people must fulfill their basic needs before fulfilling more advanced needs, reinforces this inductive finding. Through their shared experiences and perceptions, participants sought to fulfill their need of belonging, a critical component to their personal navigation and fulfillment during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent workplace changes.

## *Epilogue*

This chapter provided the individual perspectives of leaders and followers who experienced a transition to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their lived experiences describe the challenges, opportunities, and struggles this period of unplanned change created for the Office of the Registrar at the two institutions. These experiences helped to answer my three primary research questions about the role of a leader in dealing with unplanned change.

The following chapter will provide a framework of the two institutions, how they were both similar and different in their pandemic response, as well providing information for practitioners and future researchers.

## CHAPTER V

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### **Background and Overview**

The purpose of this study was to describe the role of leaders in the Office of the Registrar in fostering a sense of effectiveness when dealing with unplanned change. The study focused on institutions of higher education, and specifically, the Offices of the Registrar, who were forced to pivot to remote working environments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These remote working changes, introduced out of necessity, presented new elements for the leaders and followers within the Registrar's Office and introduced new ways of engaging, interacting, creating, and implementing in support of the many institutional constituents.

Piotrowski and King (2020) recognized that during COVID-19, higher education institutions were forced to transition to a remote working environment which left “some employees responsible for critical university operations (are) ill-equipped to perform functional responsibilities and assigned duties in a virtual environment” and that “support staff whose job functions require face-to-face interactions and/or physical university presence are potentially irrelevant in the virtual academic environment” (p. 62).

The following research questions were the basis for this study:

1. What were the perceptions of followers, in the Office of the Registrar, of the role(s) their leader played in fostering effectiveness during change (crisis)?

2. What were the self-perceptions of leaders, in the Office of the Registrar, of their role(s) in fostering employee effectiveness during change (crisis)?
3. How did COVID-19 impact the Office of the Registrar and the ability of the followers and leaders to cope with the crisis situation?

### **Methods**

A qualitative research approach was selected for this study as I sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon in the natural setting, explore the “why” types of questions about leadership,” (Klenke, 2015) and determine themes and generalizations that can be further investigated for future organizational leaders when dealing with forced change (Fraenkel et al., 2015). When deciding among the different qualitative research approaches, I selected a case study methodology because in a case study the researcher “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information . . . , and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 96-97). The bounded system in this case study are the leaders and followers within the Office of the Registrar who have experienced an unplanned change and shift from in-person working to a remote working environment as a result of COVID-19. Two institutions, located in the southern United States, were included in the study as they had contrasting organizational structures, environments, mission, and size which, as stated by Yin (2014), “analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases . . . will be more powerful than those coming from a single case” (p. 64).

A purposive sampling of both leaders and followers in the Offices of the Registrar from the two institutions was selected given their experiences in working in the Office of the Registrar while dealing with the unplanned change of shifting from in-person working to remote working due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants interviewed as part of the research sample were currently employed in the Registrar's Office at either University A or University B, and their tenure of employment ranged from a few months to more than twenty years.

A total of 34 individuals were contacted to participate in the study. Fifteen volunteers agreed to participate in the study with four participants from University A and 11 individuals from University B. The individuals who participated in the study were grouped into two samples. The first sample comprised individuals from University A and consisted of one leader and three followers. The second sample comprised of individuals from University B. Due to the organizational structure of the Office of the Registrar at University B, the group consisted of one leader, six subleaders, and four followers.

The interviews were recorded via the Zoom recording feature which allowed for verbatim transcription from each of the interview sessions, and the participants were provided with the opportunity to review the transcriptions of their interview sessions and provide any additional input or feedback. I developed a set of semi-structured interview questions for leaders in the Office of the Registrar with another list of semi-structured interview questions developed for followers in the Office of the Registrar. These can be found in Appendix D and Appendix E.

The viewpoints, thoughts, experiences, and observations gleaned from my research participants, their lived experiences and “authentic voices” allowed me to determine whether their organizational leader was more concerned with people or concerned with their institution during this time of forced change and organizational transition.

### **Summary of Findings**

As the pandemic unfolded in early 2020, colleges and universities across the United States shifted to remote working while administrative processes and functions were modified to allow for completion in a remote environment. The following summarizes the findings of my research study. I first provide a descriptive narrative of the similarities and differences experienced by the two institutional campuses, followed by the findings from each of the three research questions.

#### *Similarities and Differences: University A and University B*

A benefit of conducting a two-case study research approach of two diametrically different institutions allowed for the similarities and differences to be discovered. As stated by Yin (2014), “analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases...will be more powerful than those coming from a single case” (p. 64).

For the two institutions selected for this case study, their differences began at the type of institution selected for inclusion in the study. University A is a private, undergraduate, liberal arts institution of approximately 1,500 students while University B is a public, comprehensive research institution of over 50,000 students. The Registrar’s Office at University A has a total staff of four employees while the Office of

the Registrar at University B organizational chart indicates a staff of thirty-eight. The University Registrar is the only organizational leader within the office at University A. At University B, those with leadership responsibilities include the University Registrar, a Senior Associate Registrar, two Associate Registrars, and seven Assistant Registrars.

When the pandemic began to impact colleges and universities in mid-March 2020, the responses of University A and University B, differed as well. For the employees from University A, they “scrambled” to obtain the necessary technology and resources to successfully complete their jobs. Staff “lugged” home desktops, tried to “hotspot” off of their cell phones for internet access, or quickly ramped up in Adobe Sign or other technology applications so their processes could be updated. The customer service and “helping hand” the Office of the Registrar had previously provided to the campus community of University A required immediate adaptation and change to fulfill the needs in a rapidly changing environment. The followers of the Office of the Registrar at University A were left to “fend for themselves” in establishing and obtaining the necessary equipment, tools, or training to complete the responsibilities for which they were responsible.

For the staff members of the Office of the Registrar at University B, their transition approach to remote working was more proactive in nature. At University B, the Registrar’s Office and leadership began planning “what if” scenarios in early March 2020, in case remote working became a necessity. Staff were encouraged to bring in their laptops to test for network accessibility and to “practice” working remotely. When the remote working directive occurred, staff from the Office of the Registrar at

University B were encouraged by their leadership to take home the necessary equipment to ensure they would be comfortable in their home office locations. Some staff took home office chairs to be more comfortable while others borrowed laptops, extra monitors, keyboards, and headsets to mirror their in-the-office setups. One leader described she would “stop by” to see a staff member who lived in her neighborhood and had technology issues at her home office location.

Another significant difference between University A and University B was the assertion whether remote or hybrid work should continue or if everyone should return to the office. For University A staff members, the general sentiments were to remain working remotely or in a hybrid model as the leaders and followers felt they were more productive from home and could get more accomplished in a remote working environment. The staff members from University B desired to return to campus as quickly as possible, as they missed their colleagues and reiterated how they would be unable to support the institution with the many changes required during the pandemic, and, as a “service organization,” they needed to return to the office to provide services to students, faculty, and staff.

In terms of discovered similarities between University A and University B, a consistent message and theme was the amount of work required to support their institutions during the pandemic. This workload had an impact on the work/life balance of both the leaders and the followers, and many were left feeling “tired” after long work days in managing the evolving changes. The type of work did vary between the two institutions. University A was focused on adjusting in-person processes to processes that

could be conducted remotely, while the work of the Registrar's Office staff at University B was focused on implementing the institutional academic policy and scheduling changes.

Another discovered similarity between University A and University B was the alignment between leader and follower perceptions. For example, when I conducted a deductive analysis based upon Blake et al. (1981), I found the statements by the followers of University A were in alignment with their leader's self-perception as a "comfortable and pleasant administration." Similarly, I found the statements of the followers in the Office of the Registrar at University B to demonstrate their leader as providing a "team administration" which aligned with their leader's self-perception.

The similarities between the leadership styles of the two University Registrars should be noted as well. While University Leader A was deduced to be a "comfortable and pleasant administration" and University Leader B was reasoned to demonstrate a "team administration" approach to leadership, Blake et al. (1981) asserts these two leadership styles are similar as they both are focused on concern for the people of their organizations. The leadership approaches of University Leader A and University Leader B were different; one was more focused on institutional performance than the other, yet their leadership support for their team was of utmost importance and concern.

#### *Research Questions*

The first research question focused on the perception of the followers in the Office of the Registrar of the role their leader played in unplanned change. Based upon the perceptions of their followers, *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al.

(1981), was applied to each of the leaders to determine where on *The Grid* the leaders were located. Of the leaders and subleaders that participated in this study, and based upon their followers' perceptions, I found the following two Blake et al. (1981) leadership approaches for the majority of the leaders: "comfortable and pleasant administration" and "team administration," but was unable to deduce where on *The Grid* one of the leaders was located.

The second research question focused on the self-perception of leaders in the Office of the Registrar on the role they played on the effectiveness of the organization during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based upon the responses of the University Registrar at University A and the University Registrar at University B, I conducted a deductive analysis reflecting upon *The Academic Administrator Grid* by Blake et al. (1981) to determine the leadership styles related to their self-perception of how they fostered employee effectiveness during change. In congruence with what was identified by their followers, the leader from University A was determined to be a "comfortable and pleasant administration" with the leader from University B was deduced to be a "team administration" (Blake et al., 1981).

The final research question focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the Office of the Registrar and ability of the followers and leaders to cope with the crisis situation. After completing an iterative review of the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of the leaders and followers from University A and University B, eight inductive themes were uncovered which included (1) the impact of communication, (2) fulfillment of basic technological needs, (3) workload and work/life balance, (4) employee performance

during the pandemic, (5) process change, (6) perceptions regarding staying remote or returning to the office, (7) team strength and compassion, and (8) lack of social interaction.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

A majority of the higher education research response to COVID-19 has been focused on the faculty shift to remote teaching environments and measuring the success of new teaching methods, budget constraints for institutions of higher learning, and measuring student success in remote learning environments while supporting students with various financial and personal challenges. There has been little research related to the impact on the leaders and followers of administrative units, such as the Office of the Registrar, regarding their sense of effectiveness while transitioning from an in-person work environment to one that is remote.

The findings of this case study suggest the leaders and followers of diametrically different institutions effectively transitioned to remote working. In the example of the leader from the Office of the Registrar at University A and the multiple leaders from University B, all leaders demonstrated a high concern for people on *The Academic Administrator Grid* (Blake et al., 1981). Additional research should be conducted within the unique environment of higher education regarding the impact of organizational culture and size and the necessary leadership attributes required to facilitate unplanned change.

A further suggested area of exploration is to examine the long-term impact of crisis or unplanned change related to organizational risk mitigation. As was shared by

many of the participants, the immediate reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic was to respond quickly, implement new processes, and provide support for various campus constituencies. A missing element of the participants' response was a lack of acknowledgement related to the potential risks involved with the introduction of remote working. These may include risks related to student data, knowledge sharing, harmful or nefarious behavior that is not as obvious in a remote setting, technology security, and records retention. Additional research and exploration should be conducted regarding the role leaders and followers play in the mitigation of risk when handling a crisis situation.

### **Recommendations for Practitioners in Higher Education**

One recommendation for practitioners in higher education is to utilize the opportunity of a crisis to “reflect on the current organizational approaches and allocation of resources” (Knowles & Saxberg, 1988). As the participants from University A and University B discussed, they were able to make changes to processes, procedures, and policies on an abridged and quickened timeframe. While higher education leaders must be cognizant not to create unrealistic expectations and timelines for their followers, leaders must also recognize when an opportunity presents itself to seek additional financial resources, a change to a cumbersome long-standing policy, or jettison previous approaches that may no longer be necessary given the changing environment.

A second opportunity for administrators in higher education is to focus on organizational efficiency and effectiveness and to utilize this experience of the pandemic as a reflective opportunity. Similar to the research by D’Auria and De Smet (2020) regarding leading in times of crisis, a multi-disciplinary network of teams should be

empowered post-pandemic to review the organizational approach to the crisis, determine what elements were successful, identify any problems or lessons learned, and develop solutions for any remaining issues.

### **Recommendations for Leadership Development Practitioners**

Practitioners responsible for providing leadership development opportunities for leaders and followers can use the findings of this study as an opportunity to inform and develop future outreach and training programs.

First, as was suggested by all of the participants, communication during the pandemic and in the time of unplanned change, was critical to organizational effectiveness. As leadership development practitioners develop new training and outreach programs, a focus on crisis communication should be included. Weiss and Li (2020) found successful leaders communicate frequently in a variety of communication modalities to keep everyone informed of the necessary changes. As leadership practitioners develop strategies to prepare leaders for unplanned change, training on the importance of communication along with the appropriate usage of communication techniques should be included.

Another application for leadership practitioners is to advance leadership curriculum focused on the necessary traits to navigate change. As identified by the participants in this case study and also in the literature, leaders need to be adaptable, resilient, agile, decisive, honest, and transparent. As practitioners develop training for new leaders, they should ensure these specific topics are included along with applicable resources.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

DIVISION OF RESEARCH



**APPROVAL OF RESEARCH**  
**Using Expedited Procedures**  
(Common Rule – Effective January 2018)

August 23, 2021

Type of Review: Submission Response for Initial Review Submission Form  
Title: The Office of the Registrar during COVID-19: A Case Study

Investigator: Jennifer Strong  
IRB ID: IRB2021-0897  
Reference Number: 128400  
Funding: N/A  
Special Determinations: Written consent in accordance with 45 CFR 46.117/ 21 CFR 50.27

Dear Jennifer Strong:

The IRB approved this research on 08/23/2021 using expedited review procedures.

Before 06/22/2022, you are to submit an Administrative Check-In Form to the HRPP/IRB. If the HRPP/IRB does not receive the form, there will be no approval of new research after 08/22/2022.

In conducting this research, you are reminded of the following requirements:

- You must follow the approved protocol;
- You must use IRB-approved and stamped study documents (available in iRIS);
- Any changes to the research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to implementation;
- Unanticipated problems or other reportable events (including protocol deviations) as described in "[HRP-029 Reportable New Information](#)" must be reported to the IRB within 5 working days of learning of the incident;
- You must notify the IRB of study completion.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Administrative Office at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636.

Sincerely,  
IRB Administration

APPENDIX B  
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

On the phone:

“Hello, my name is Brenda Schumann, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Texas A&M University. I am calling to see if you would be available to participate in a research study. The focus of my study is about leaders and followers in the Office of the Registrar who, because of COVID-19, made a shift from an in-person working environment to one that is remote.

Your participation in the study should take a total of 90 minutes. The interview itself will last approximately 60 minutes with an additional 30 minutes after the interview for you to review your transcribed data. Participation is completely voluntary and all answers will remain confidential.

If you are interested in participating in the interview process, we can schedule a time now or I can contact you again in the future to establish an interview time.”

If the individual is interested, the investigator will schedule a mutually agreeable time and location for the interview as well as provide the investigator’s contact information.

“You are scheduled for an interview on \_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 830-305-2919 or [bas763@tamu.edu](mailto:bas763@tamu.edu). Thank you again for your willingness to participate in the interview. I look forward to visiting with you.”

If the individual is not interested, the investigator will discontinue the call:

“Thank you for your consideration of my request, and I wish you a successful academic year.”

APPENDIX C  
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear,

I am currently a Doctoral Candidate at Texas A&M University, and I write to see if you would be available to participate in a research study.

The focus of my study will be on leaders and followers who, because of COVID-19, made a shift from an in-person working environment to one that is remote. As we have all experienced, COVID-19 has changed many things on our respective university campuses and this study will focus specifically on Registrar's Offices that experienced this transition.

Participation in the study should take about 90 minutes of your time. The interview itself will last approximately 60 minutes with an additional 30 minutes after the interview for you to review your transcribed data. Please note, participation in the study is completely voluntary and all answers will remain confidential.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email, and I will contact you to schedule a time for an interview. Please feel free to contact me directly at [bas763@tamu.edu](mailto:bas763@tamu.edu) or Dr. Jen Strong ([Dr.Jen@tamu.edu](mailto:Dr.Jen@tamu.edu)), if you have any questions about your participation in this study.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Best,

Brenda Schumann  
Doctoral Candidate  
Texas A&M University

## APPENDIX D

### LEADER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How long have you worked at your institution?
2. Please describe the Office of the Registrar structure and institutional responsibilities at your institution.
  - a. Before COVID?
  - b. During COVID?
  - c. Present Day?
3. How would you describe your professional relationship with your staff before COVID?
4. Can you please talk about your personal experience in transitioning to a remote working environment?
5. How would you describe the Office of the Registrar's transition to remote working and the impact on the staff? How did they handle the transition?
6. How did you engage with your staff during COVID and remote work?
7. Can you describe the characteristics and attitudes of those employees who handled the transition to remote working well?
8. Can you provide names of three of your staff members who you would suggest I talk with about their transition to remote working who had a positive transition?
9. Can you describe the characteristics and attitudes of those employees who you feel struggled with the transition to remote working?

10. Can you provide names of three of your staff members who you would suggest I talk with about their transition to remote working who may have struggled with the transition?
11. Looking back on the transition to remote working, is there anything you would have done differently to facilitate the transition for staff?
12. Is there anything you feel that you did exceptionally well as the leader of the Registrar's Office to ease the transition for staff to a remote working environment?
13. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss relating to the transition of the Office of the Registrar from in-person to remote working because of COVID-19?
14. In thinking about your transition back to "normal working conditions" can you talk about what decisions you made in deciding what the "new normal" would look like?
15. How have you engaged and interacted with staff during the "new normal" working environment?
16. Can you talk about the characteristics and attitudes of staff members who have "well-adjusted" to the "new normal?" Can you provide names of three staff members with whom I can follow-up?
17. Can you talk about the characteristics and attitudes of staff members who may have struggled to the "new normal?" Can you provide names of three staff members with whom I can follow-up?

18. Is there anything you feel that you did exceptionally well as the leader of the Registrar's Office to ease the transition for staff in returning to the "new normal" environment after the initial COVID precautions/protocols have eased?
19. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss relating to the transition of the Office of the Registrar to the "new normal" environment?

## APPENDIX E

### FOLLOWER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How long have you worked at your institution?
2. What are your day-to-day-responsibilities in the Office of the Registrar?
  - a. Before COVID?
  - b. During COVID?
  - c. Present Day?
3. How long have you worked with your leader?
4. How would you describe your professional relationship with your leader?
5. Before COVID, how did you engage with your leader?
6. Can you please talk about your experience regarding the transition to a remote working environment?
7. Did your leader assist in the transition to remote work?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. If not, why?
8. Did the experience and transition to remote working change your view of your leader?
  - a. If so, how? Why?
9. After the transition to remote working, how did you engage with your leader?  
Did you engage more or less than before? Why?
10. What has been the biggest challenge in moving to a remote working environment?

11. Did your transition to remote work change your day-to-day responsibilities or interactions as a member of the Office of the Registrar?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. If not, why?
12. Is there anything you feel that your leader did exceptionally to ease the transition to remote working for staff?
13. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss relating to the transition of the Office of the Registrar from in-person to remote working because of COVID-19?
14. Now that your campus has returned to a "new normal" working environment, can you please talk about your experience regarding the transition to the "new normal?"
15. Did your leader assist in the transition to the "new normal?"
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. If not, why?
16. Did the experience and transition to the "new normal" change your view of your leader?
  - a. If so, how? Why?
17. After the transition to your "new normal" environment, how did you engage with your leader? Did you engage more or less than before? Why?
18. What has been the biggest challenge in moving to the "new normal?"
19. Did your transition to a "new normal" environment change your day-to-day responsibilities or interactions as a member of the Office of the Registrar?

a. If so, how?

b. If not, why?

20. Is there anything you feel that your leader did exceptionally to ease the transition to the “new normal” environment?

21. Is there anything else you’d like to discuss relating to the transition of the Office of the Registrar to the “new normal” environment?

APPENDIX F  
CONSENT FORM

*Title of Research Study:* The Office of the Registrar During COVID-19: A Case Study

*Investigator:* Dr. Jen Strong, Principal Investigator; Brenda Schumann, PhD Student

*Funded/Supported By:* This research is funded/supported by Texas A&M University.

***Why are you being invited to take part in a research study?***

You are being asked to participate because of your experiences as a staff member in the Office of the Registrar during COVID-19.

***What should you know about a research study?***

Someone will explain this research study to you.  
Whether or not you take part is up to you.  
You can choose not to take part.  
You can agree to take part and later change your mind.  
Your decision will not be held against you.  
You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

***Who can I talk to?***

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, talk to the research team at

Dr. Jen Strong, Principal Investigator

Jennifer.strong@tamu.edu

Phone: 979-862-1423

Brenda Schumann, PhD Student

bas763@tamu.edu

Phone: 830-305-2919

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Texas A&M Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may talk to them at by 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu), if

You cannot reach the research team.

Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You have questions about your rights as a research participant.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

***Why is this research being done?***

The purpose of this study is to describe the role of leaders in the Office of the Registrar in fostering a sense of engagement when dealing with unplanned change. The focus will be on

institutions of higher education, and specifically, the Offices of the Registrar who were forced to become remote working environments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These remote working changes, introduced out of necessity, presented a new element for the leaders within the Registrar's Office and the staff within the office as the transition to remote working introduced new ways of engaging, interacting, creating, and implementing to best support the faculty, staff, and students of the institution.

***How long will the research last?***

2 months

***How many people will be studied?***

We expect to interview approximately 15 people in this study.

***What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?***

If you choose to participate in this research, you will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview conducted by Brenda Schumann. The interview will last approximately one hour, and if you approve, the interview will be audio recorded for ease in transcription of the interview. Following your interview, you will be provided with the detailed transcripts from your interview to review for accuracy. Your review should take approximately thirty minutes.

The interview will be conducted via Zoom given COVID-19 protocols as well as local and state guidelines.

***What happens if I do not want to be in this research?***

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

***What happens if I say “Yes”, but I change my mind later?***

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

If you decide to leave the research, contact the investigator so that the investigator can remove you from the list of participants.

***Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?***

***Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not wish to answer. The questions you will be asked impose no more/greater than risks that you would come across in everyday life.***

***Another risk includes the potential breach of privacy or confidentiality of your interview. The researchers have reduced this risk by utilizing pseudo names for all participants, as well as storing all information on encrypted media in a secure location.***

***Will being in this study help me in any way?***

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research.

However, possible benefits include the identification of leadership characteristics that may be beneficial for leaders to utilize in fostering a sense of engagement among staff.

***What happens to the information collected for the research?***

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report or presentation that might be published. Research records will be

stored securely and only accessible to Ms. Brenda A. Schumann and Dr. Jennifer R. Strong, faculty chair, who will have access to the records. Information about you will be stored in a locked file cabinet; computer files protected via encryption key with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and other records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete privacy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the TAMU HRPP/IRB and other representatives of this institution.

***Optional Elements:***

The following research activities are optional, meaning that you do not have to agree to them in order to participate in the research study. Please indicate your willingness to participate in these optional activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

**Signature Block for Capable Adult**

**Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person obtaining consent

APPENDIX G

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_, transcriptionist and/or translator, individually and on behalf of Brenda Schumann, Doctoral Student at Texas A&M University, do hereby agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes, videotapes, and oral or written documentation received from Brenda Schumann related to his/her research study titled THE OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR DURING COVID-19: A CASE STUDY. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped or live oral interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not disclose any information received for profit, gain, or otherwise;
3. To not make copies of any audiotapes, videotapes, or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Brenda Schumann
4. To store all study-related audiotapes, videotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
5. To return all audiotapes, videotapes and study-related documents to Brenda Schumann in a complete and timely manner.
6. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

Please provide the following contact information for the researcher and the transcriber and/or translator:

For Transcriber/Translator:

For Researcher:

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes, videotapes and/or paper files to which I will have access. I am further aware that if any breach of confidentiality occurs, I will be fully subject to the laws of the State of Texas.

Transcriber/ Translator's name \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber/Translator's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber/Translator's Name of Business and Title (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_