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DEVELOPING DEANS AS EFFECTIVE LEADERS FOR TODAY'S CHANGING EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

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The ability to serve as an effective leader of an academic school or college represents a significant challenge in today's world of higher education. Deans have an increased set of responsibilities and expanded roles because of economic pressures, political turmoil, and regulatory changes. They must represent the university in the community, and they must work with legislators and potential donors to help move their institutions forward (Montez, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 2003). They must be vigilant about the ever-constant scrutiny from policy makers, legislators, the business community, and the media. At the same time, they bear ultimate responsibility for all internal matters such as the budget, curriculum and program development, as well as faculty and staff performance. As academic facilitators and intermediaries between presidential initiatives, administrative operations, faculty governance, and student needs, deans need to be equipped to work successfully with a range of interests, individuals, and groups to promote the missions of their institution and academic unit (Rosser, Johnsrud, & Heck, 2003).

A study conducted more than 20 years ago about deans' effectiveness revealed that their dedicated support of their university, coupled with their skillful management, enabled them to enjoy success (Martin, 1993). Today's deans, on the other hand, encounter additional pressures and unanticipated challenges because of their universities' pressures to educate an increasingly diverse student population with fewer resources. As a result, deans experience role ambiguity about their job priorities, which leads to confusion and frustration (Montez, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 2003). Moreover, because deans influence faculty performance and student achievement, without steady leadership in the role, it is more difficult for schools and colleges to lead the way in developing programs and curricula that positively affect student learning outcomes and

prepare them for future pursuits. Collectively, these challenges make the deanship a worthy test case across a range of disciplinary programs.

Even though we might acknowledge the important role of academic deans in directing their schools and colleges, research on their leadership characteristics does not really rise to the level of a “hot topic.” Some possible reasons for this complacency or indifference might be the revolving door syndrome in a single appointment of about five years previously identified (Gmelch et al. 1999; Robbins and Schmitt 1994), lack of formal preparation needed for serving in a dean’s role effectively, and the lack of explicit eligibility criteria for professionals assuming such a position.

Research on the characteristics and practices of deans who have the staying power to remain in their positions can contribute to leadership stability. Such research can also help standing deans reflect on their own characteristics and practices, and can assist prospective deans in understanding ways in which successful practicing deans are functioning in their positions. To that end, this article recommends specific interpersonal/negotiating skills that deans can use when they work closely with key persons inside and outside their institutions.

Current Literature on Academic Deans

Most research conducted about deans in the United States has focused on biographical, structural, and contextual factors (Anderson & King 1987; Blumberg 1988; Bowen 1995; Bright & Richards 2001; Clifford & Guthrie 1988; Dejnozka 1978; Denmark 1983; Gardner 1992; Geiger 1989; Gmelch 1999; Heald 1982; Howey & Zimpher 1990; Huffman-Joley 1992; Jackson 2000; Judge 1982; Riggs & Huffman 1989; Thiessen & Howey 1998; Wisniewski 1977). Deans are positioned in the middle of administrative hierarchies in colleges and universities. They must mediate between administration and faculty (Dill 1980; Gmelch 2002; Gould 1983; Kerr 1998; McCarty & Reyes 1987; McGannon 1987; Morris 1981; Salmen 1971; Zimpher 1995). They arrange and organize personnel and material resources to accomplish objectives of immediate importance, and they help faculty move in directions that correspond to the overall mission of the institution (Morsink 1987). They also promote quality teaching and scholarly activity, develop effective partnerships with schools, community agencies, not-for-profit and for-profit organizations, and participate in strategic planning/goal setting (Bruess, McLean, & Sun, 2003).

Although it appears that deans should possess certain characteristics to succeed within their contexts over time, we are unaware of research by currently practicing deans that uses their own autobiographical and self-reflective comparisons to examine their leadership practices. Bowen’s (1995) *The wizard of odds: Leadership journeys of education deans* provides self-reflective narratives from three different education deans about their experiences in the role, but these deans had already stepped down from their positions. Their introspective-retrospective accounts of their experiences as deans do manage to provide many lessons learned about mismatched expectations. Even so, studies of self-reflective practices across deans are needed

from those still employed in these positions to better understand not only characteristics that are used frequently, but also those used to effectively address situations and challenges.

Background and Theoretical Framework

This present research is the next step of a six-year study in which six deans (one dean is from the original group) participated in an introspective-retrospective analysis of characteristics and themes that emerged from five different vignettes that each dean wrote. The deans identified the topics and created the format for writing the vignettes about situations within their own schools and colleges. The five vignettes centered on program development, special initiatives, personnel, accreditation, and external relations. The deans' vignette analysis, through axial and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), led to the identification of 14 key themes and four overarching characteristics including: vision, interpersonal/negotiating skills, managerial skills, and confidence.

While the four original deans found that all characteristics and themes were used across the 20 vignettes, the most frequently used themes resided with interpersonal/negotiation skills. The four themes within this characteristic were: (1) working closely with key persons within the unit (school, college, or department) and outside the organization; (2) negotiating key players' responsibilities to keep them appropriately involved, aware of and respectful of boundaries, and honest about their level of participation and contributions to the partnership; (3) being responsive to critical persons in the overall organization; and (4) keeping critical persons in the organization informed so that they are willing to support resource needs. Further analysis indicated that the most frequently used theme was working closely with key persons within the unit and outside the organization.

Both the original group of deans and our current group adapted Eisner's connoisseurship model (1998) as a theoretical framework for engaging in this extended study. Eisner's model promotes the use of a wide array of experiences, understandings, and information to name and appreciate the different dimensions of situations and experiences, and the way they relate to each other. His approach is interpretive, and includes two major components: connoisseurship and criticism (Willis 2007). A connoisseur is able to identify the different dimensions of situations and experiences, and their relationships. Whereas a connoisseur appreciates a situation, s/he also critiques the same situation to help others see its subtle and not-so-subtle aspects. Through experience, a connoisseur has learned to perceive patterns and make interpretations about specific interests or situations (Eisner 1998). When a connoisseur shares his/her views with others, the role shifts to that of a critic by illuminating, interpreting, and appraising the qualities of circumstances, experiences, and phenomena.

To be both a connoisseur and critic, a person needs to engage in a continuing exploration of him or herself and others in an arena of practice, and make public observations through criticism, so that others can learn from experiences and perceptions before engaging in one's own work. In order to be able to make

informed and committed judgments, a person needs to reflect about his/her actions and feelings about those actions.

Eisner's qualitative research approach draws from the arts and humanities, and focuses on using the approach in teacher education. His approach can be applied to studying leadership characteristics when experienced deans have a schema for understanding the subtle and not-so-subtle aspects of their situations. His model for studying situations can help deans to become more aware of the characteristics and qualities of their leadership practices. Leaders who use his model engage in a continuing exploration of self and others, use critical disclosure to enable others to learn from past experiences, reflect about actions and make informed and committed judgments, and work collaboratively with others.

Because we have had a variety of different experiences and challenges over time in the deanship, we have developed certain understandings and knowledge about the position that enables us to both appreciate and critique the subtle and not-so-subtle aspects of situations; thus, serving as both connoisseurs and critics of our leadership practices. Our current group of three deans has each served in our respective position a minimum of eight years. Collectively, we have accrued nearly 30 years in the deanship. We followed traditional routes of first serving as tenured faculty and then assuming increasingly more administrative responsibilities before becoming deans. We have been, and continue to be, influenced by presidents, provosts, and other deans. We have and continue to attend leadership in higher education institutes and seminars to learn from others in similar positions and reflect on our own actions. We currently represent one public and two private institutions of different sizes and in different regions and states.

Methodology

In effect, we investigated ways in which we work closely with key persons within the unit and outside our organizations to illuminate what deans do, and need to do, to move their schools and colleges forward. We documented our experiences with others during 15 scheduled meetings (5 per dean) in early fall 2013: six one-on-one, six small group (two to 5 people), and 3 large group (six or more people). For each meeting, we charted the following: purpose/content; people involved in the meeting; reporting relationships of those involved in the meeting; resolved issues/accomplishments; unresolved issues; lessons learned from the meeting; and recommendations. Table 1 presents a small section of a sample chart.

We used telephone conference calls and email to discuss a protocol for recording information, analyzing data, and identifying emerging themes from the recommendations and lessons learned. We determined that, for the recommendations and lessons learned, we should: 1) assemble all *specific recommendations*; 2) treat *specific lessons learned as specific recommendations* when appropriate; and 3) sort and seek themes for the *major recommendations*. We used axial and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to identify the major recommendations.

Table 1. *Sample chart*

Purpose, Content and Date	People Involved	Reporting Relationships	Resolved Issues/Accomplishments	Unresolved Issues	Lessons Learned	Recommendations to Others
<p>One-on-One Meeting To discuss faculty member's future with the college.</p>	Associate professor in _____program	Reports to Coordinator of the program, chairperson of department, and then Dean	<p>He wanted to know where I stood about his future at the college because he found out that he was not supported by the P&T Committee for reappointment.</p> <p>We discussed reasons for the P&T Committee's decisions.</p> <p>When he left, I thought that he was satisfied with my response.</p>	Uncertain whether the college will support him.	<p>Resentment built up with the faculty because he was paid more and did less.</p> <p>I needed to be open to different scenarios and understand that, no matter what, I was going to take a hit from some constituency. I realized that I had to think of institutional needs over individual needs in this case.</p> <p>I learned about the intensity of jealousies between faculty members, and realized that I must be sympathetic yet emphatic about where we as a college need to go.</p>	<p>When faculty say that they will accept nothing less than a certain dollar amount for salaries, stipends, etc., and you think that they are way off base, find ways, as hard as it is, to negotiate with them to what is reasonable</p> <p>When a faculty member stirs the pot and gets students to complain about college policy, take a step back to assess the situation before you intervene in any way. Analyze where other faculty stand and analyze what you can realistically do without creating a cause célèbre.</p> <p>If faculty on P&T are justified in the recommendations that they make, support their recommendation, even though it is easier to keep someone because of student allegiance.</p> <p>Try not to get caught up in the latest and loudest argument; instead, take a step back to figure out what is best for the institution within the context of the institution.</p>

Findings

The purpose of our meetings varied. The one-to-one meetings entailed: 1) a faculty member's future at the college; 2) a weekly meeting with the Provost; 3) a department chair's future in the role; 4) a Director of

Teacher Education's issues with same department chair; 5) a monthly update meeting with an Associate Dean; and 6) a regular update meeting with a Development officer. These one-on-one meetings helped to provide information and guidance, determine what others were thinking, secure what had been requested, communicate role expectations, discover progress with tasks, clarify structure with the development office, confront a department chair about behavior, and affirm the value of some relationships.

The small group (2 to 5 persons) meetings focused on: 1) an external grant proposal; 2) the role of a Professional Development School principal; 3) conversion of classroom space; 4) differential tuition; 5) an underperforming longtime faculty member; and 6) incentivizing retirement for the faculty member noted above. The small group meetings enabled participants to develop a grant proposal, clarify role expectations, establish consensus on the use of space, establish a strategy for tuition, develop an institutional strategy for encouraging faculty retirement, and present a retirement proposal.

The large group (6 persons or more) involved: 1) monthly Chairs Council; 2) Operating Council for University-Hospital Clinic; and 3) a volunteer board for new Catholic high school. The large group meetings provided an opportunity to provide oversight of programs and external mandates, identify issues with joint oversight by two different organizations, and formalize documents for a new Catholic high school.

An analysis of the reporting relationships of the persons involved with these meetings revealed that five reported to the Dean (4 one-on-one; 1 large group); 1 reported to Provost (one-on-one), eight were mixed (1 one-on-one; 6 small group; 1 large group), and one was external (large group).

Our individual reflections of these meetings led us to identify 84 specific recommendations (e.g., "Try not to take disagreements personally. While sometimes self-motivated, other times they are truly good for the organization") and 53 lessons learned (e.g., "Don't react to passive-aggressive behavior or provocation from others, no matter the reporting hierarchy"). Our analysis of the combined 137 specific recommendations and lessons learned led us to identify 14 major recommendations that incorporated these thoughts. Table 2 provides the breakdown of specific recommendations and lessons learned for each major recommendation, presented in no particular order.

The 14 recommendations are as follows:

- 1) Be vigilant
- 2) Remain calm
- 3) Value relationships and others' achievements
- 4) Be strategic
- 5) Provide guidance and coaching
- 6) Plan ahead
- 7) Seek help and learn from others
- 8) Solve problems creatively
- 9) Follow through

- 10) Set limits
- 11) Trust in yourself
- 12) Persist
- 13) Be prepared to deal with consequences of difficult decisions
- 14) Don't assume

Table 2. Total Recommendations and Lessons Learned

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
	Be vigilant	Remain calm	Value relationships & others' achievements	Be strategic	Provide guidance and coaching	Plan ahead	Seek help and learn from others	Solve problems creatively	Follow through	Set limits	Trust in yourself	Persist	Be prepared to deal with consequences of difficult decisions	Don't assume	
	13	9	12	25	9	9	8	6	5	9	8	9	4	11	137
	8LL ¹	3LL	4LL	7LL	3LL	4LL	4LL	2LL	1LL	4LL	2LL	3LL	2LL	6LL	53LL
	5R ²	6R	8R	18R	6R	5R	4R	4R	4R	5R	6R	6R	2R	5R	84R

¹ Lessons Learned
² Recommendations

Table 3 presents an example comment for each of the recommendations. Some types of recommendations occurred more frequently than others. For example, nearly 20 percent of the specific recommendations and lessons learned focused on being strategic. Comments such as *“Have someone else with you, as much as possible, to get another perspective, especially if it is a new venture”* and *“Support from one’s own team is important for any outside initiative; otherwise, it doesn’t work. Enlist those who truly can add something to an initiative rather than just a warm body”* focused on having a plan of action for achieving a particular goal. Also cited frequently, but less so than the idea of being strategic, was the need to be vigilant (e.g., *“Partnerships can be fragile. Be vigilant.”*), value others (e.g., *“It’s about relationships. Investing in nurturance of those relationships can pay off at other times.”*), and not to assume (e.g., *“Never assume. What you think will be an easy sell might not be”*).

Two recommendations cited the least frequently were to be prepared to deal with consequences of difficult decisions (e.g., *“Be willing to make leadership changes and, if possible, have the successor identified or be prepared to take on some notable portion or all of the responsibility yourself”*), follow through (e.g., *“Do what you can to take the initiative to follow through on items discussed so that others don’t see you as just a delegator, but a team player”*), and solve problems creatively (e.g., *“Don’t assume that a problem is unsolvable without exploring as many options as possible”*).

Table 3. Examples of Deans' Comments for Each of the 14 Recommendations

1. Be Vigilant

"Ask lots of questions of people entrusted with budget responsibilities when they report to you. Monitor their ability to use resources wisely and responsibly."

2. Remain Calm

"Don't react and show emotion. Try to respond calmly and emphatically to get your point across."

3. Value relationships and others' achievements

"Try to see the good in each and every person, if possible, and try to understand what motivates them so that it is easier to cope with those who are bullies, domineering, irritating, and offensive to you and others. As leaders, we must rise above the noise."

4. Be Strategic

"If at all possible, only place those in leadership positions who you know will operate with integrity and be supportive of your deanship."

5. Provide guidance and coaching

"Need to take time to figure out what a person can and cannot do, what that person is thinking, and what the person needs to keep that person functioning to capacity."

6. Plan ahead

"Come in to your weekly meetings (if that is the set-up) with a written agenda that is dated so that you have a continuous record of conversations and decisions."

7. Seek help and learn from others

"Don't be too shy or proud to ask for help when feeling beleaguered."

8. Solve problems creatively

"It can pay to explore situations that you might regard as akin to hopeless. There may be unknown options that can be utilized creatively to achieve a desired result. In other words, where there is a will, there may be a way, but you've got to explore all opportunities."

9. Follow through

"Do our part to follow up with items as soon as possible so that others take your volunteerism seriously, and know that you will follow up."

10. Set limits

"Sometimes you just have to draw the line or just outright say "no" to taking on additional work."

11. Trust in yourself

"Try not to take things personally, even though this is easier said than done."

12. Persist

"Be sure to explore barriers to desired judgments exhaustively with the decision maker."

13. Be prepared to deal with the consequences of difficult decisions

"Be willing to make leadership changes and, if possible, have the successor identified or be prepared to take on some notable portion or all of the responsibility yourself."

14. Don't assume

"Don't assume that someone can do the job because of previous experience, which may or may not have prepared that person."

Discussion and Implications

As deans' roles are changing because of fiscal, political, legislative, and demographic forces affecting universities, their abilities to work effectively with others is even more critical than ever for accomplishing shifting responsibilities. Accordingly, the intent of this study was to analyze introspectively and retrospectively interpersonal/negotiating skills used while working closely with key persons within the unit and outside the organization. In effect, we used scheduled meetings with our respective stakeholders to study what happened, what we learned from these meetings, and what we would recommend to ourselves and others for functioning as effectively as possible.

Based on our understanding of Eisner's connoisseurship model (1998), we believe that we had developed a schema for understanding the subtle and not-so-subtle aspects of our situations. We used these understandings to study our own leadership behaviors and strategies during our one-on-one, small group, and large group meetings to identify lessons learned and specific recommendations.

Insights about Meetings. We found that face-to-face meetings were important, because they allowed participants to share perspectives in person, find common ground, and walk away with plans of action. Email exchanges and telephone conversations would not have been as effective in promoting the level of interaction that occurred during the meetings. The purposes of the meetings varied, from addressing serious and important personnel issues to discussing procedural challenges and policy issues for the school or college. The meetings did not lead to any definitive "slam dunks," but rather to incremental progress as a result of carefully planned interactions.

Analyses of our perceptions of what transpired at these meetings led us to identify 14 major recommendations that captured what we considered most important for working closely with those who report to us, those to whom we report, and a mixture of other reporting relationships inside and outside our institutions. Although some major recommendations such as "be strategic" included more specific recommendations and lessons learned than others, we found that each recommendation was important for highlighting a critical facet of working with others to accomplish goals that are consistent with a school or college's vision and mission.

Insights about Recommendations. The recommendations represent three deans' insights about interpersonal/negotiating skill characteristics that arose from 15 different meetings. Some generalized recommendations emerged as a result of our individual recommendations from challenging situations mentioned from the meetings. For example, the recommendation to "Solve Problems Creatively" (Recommendation #8) reflects the individual recommendation: *"When a faculty member stirs the pot and gets students to complain about college policy, take a step back to assess the situation before you intervene in any way. Analyze where other faculty stand and analyze what you can realistically do without creating a cause célèbre."* We realized that a recommendation should focus on one's ability to transcend the immediate issues to be able to respond with creative, suitable, and useful ideas. We recognize that the 14 recommendations simply represent what we personally discovered about our interactions in our own subset of meetings. Almost certainly there are other recommendations that deans should incorporate as they work closely with others inside and outside their institutions.

Some recommendations would not necessarily be considered an interpersonal/negotiating skill characteristic, so much as a fit with managerial skills (e.g., Plan ahead—Recommendation #6 and Follow through—Recommendation #9) and confidence (e.g., Trust in yourself—Recommendation #11) characteristics that were initially identified in the initial studies (Wepner, Hopkins, Johnson, & Damico, S. , 2011). This

reinforces the notion that while working with others, which is the most critical part of the job, a dean must possess essential characteristics for performing the job well.

Reflection of the 14 major recommendations led us to conclude that deans spend much of their time facilitating and mediating. For example, one of us used the one-on-one meeting with the director of teacher education to mediate and thus facilitate a better relationship with the department chair so that they could work together more effectively. Deans also depend on intuition, instinct, and experience to accomplish goals. For example, one of us used the monthly one-on-one meeting with an associate dean to help that person recognize that previous experiences in one position did not necessarily translate into needed skills for the current position.

It also bears mentioning that deans can make things happen that many others cannot. For instance, bringing together a volunteer board for a new Catholic high school requires access to and the cultivation of connections and relationships with administrators and faculty inside the institution and influential community members outside the institution. At the same time, deans need to learn how to operate under constraints. For example, faculty governance precludes deans from making arbitrary decisions about personnel or curriculum. The one-on-one meeting that one of us had about a faculty member's future arose after the college's personnel committee determined that the faculty member would not be eligible for tenure.

Even though deans are in different situations, there are fundamental similarities in how they need to comport themselves as they work with other people. Clearly deans need to bring their A-game when interacting with others. They also cannot relax because of the complexity of the job. In fact, there may be universality to being a dean vis-à-vis in-the-moment interactions with others. As administrators in the middle of the higher education institutional hierarchy, deans need to use their interpersonal/negotiating skills to shepherd faculty and administrative staff to subscribe to institutional goals and, at the same time, educate provosts, vice presidents, and presidents about the unique and complex needs of their own schools and colleges.

Limitations of Study. There were three major limitations to our study. The first limitation is that we have different personalities, serve in different contexts, and have different issues. As a result, we cannot make generalizations across deanships that responses, experiences, and challenges would be the same. The second limitation is that we did not use an altogether systematic way of selecting meetings to study. It is possible that other meetings could have led to different recommendations, based on the people involved and the issues addressed. The third limitation is that the data that we provided depended on our perceptions of what occurred at the meetings, based on our knowledge of the individuals involved. While we acknowledge that objective observers probably would provide somewhat different insights, we also believe that, because of their lack of involvement with the individuals and situations, they would not have been able to offer the same degree or level of inferences.

Benefits of Self-Reflection. Notwithstanding these limitations, we found that there is enormous value in thinking about one's daily work with respect to lessons learned and recommendations for working with others. There is still more value in documenting and reflecting on one's work individually and then discussing it with other deans. We found that there was enormous therapeutic benefit in having other deans as sounding boards. Our jobs are highly politicized and, as a result, require the ability to find common ground to move people and projects forward. Thus, as deans, we need to connect, cooperate, and collaborate with others in similar roles so that we can accomplish what is expected within and outside our schools and colleges. This capacity is especially critical for influencing faculty performance and upper-level administrative decisions, acquiring the necessary resources to help our units function effectively, positively impacting student achievement, and satisfying external mandates and accreditation standards. Although we realized that our ability to work successfully with others comes down to the specific person and context, namely the institutional culture, norms, expectations, and people, we also learned that there indeed exist certain interpersonal/negotiating skills that apply to all deans.

Recommendations and Future Research

Although we do not really know whether one's interpersonal/negotiating skills can be developed deliberately, in particular, the ability to work closely with others, we do believe that it is important for practicing and prospective deans to have access to opportunities for professional development in this realm. Such professional development might focus on ways in which deans are able to incorporate the 14 recommendations into their work with others. Self-reflection about the outcomes of both successful and unsuccessful meetings in relation to the use of the recommendations can help to determine future strategies to use with the same and different stakeholders. For example, a dean's ability to "remain calm" (Recommendation #2) in the face of public humiliation by a faculty member or superior is difficult, yet essential for communicating composure and confidence. Studying one's response in such situations helps to prepare for the next encounter. Ideally, deans would have opportunities to form study groups to examine different types of situations and different types of deans' responses, both effective and less effective, to be able to analyze ways in which deans were successful, or not, in accomplishing goals and objectives. Case studies could be helpful in this regard.

Deans should also take opportunities to self-reflect about their own challenging situations to help determine ways in which their own patterns of behavior are contributing, or not contributing, to achievement of their goals. While these provisions amount to a tall order that could require expert consultants for mentoring deans on effective leadership practices, they would contribute to developing resiliency in the deanship which would help with leadership stability in higher education. Because most deans have not received formal training for their positions, and usually assume these positions as a result of a self-identified

interest or recognition by others of leadership potential, it is especially important to provide guidance and mentoring on critical leadership skills.

In addition to an ever-growing wish list for professional development, we continue to want to investigate ways in which we work with others. The ability to videotape meetings would enable deans to drill down on communication patterns during meetings by analyzing reasons for comments in relation to the individuals, the meeting's purpose, and the context for the meeting. An ability to compare communication patterns during scheduled meetings versus impromptu conversations in hallways or other individuals' offices would provide additional insights about deans' interpersonal/negotiating skill patterns. Finally, systematic examination of email and other social media as well as telephone communication would offer yet another opportunity to study how deans interact with others to eventually be able to develop recommendations and protocols for facilitating productive and satisfactory outcomes in different venues and through different mediums.

Self-reflection is not always easy, yet it is critical for moving forward. One cannot assume that deans are capable of self-reflection. Opportunities to self-reflect about what deans are thinking and doing can help them to see more clearly their own habits of mind and patterns of practice. Deans' increased self-awareness should help them to create cultures that work for them in relation to their stakeholders, which in turn, can help with their effective leadership in today's changing educational landscape.

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