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The multifaceted role of an academic dean in higher education requires a range of administrative competence that spans academic and scholarly leadership, resource and personnel management, governance, strategic planning and execution, faculty and staff development, climate setting, advocacy, external and public affairs, relationship building, community engagement, alumni relations, assessment, and possibly fundraising. The facility to serve as an effective leader of any school, college, or division is vital for continually responding to multiple internal and external demands.

Deans of education are uniquely challenged by both internal and external demands. Indeed, deans of teacher and leadership preparation programs have been charged with, among many other directives, intensely examining their impact on the whole gamut of PK-16 teaching and learning, especially in the United States. Accordingly, education deans, directors, and the like must articulate their role as leaders of change in the field as they determine ways to provide concrete evidence of how their programs accelerate and deepen the learning and mastery not only of their teacher and leadership candidates, but also the learning that takes place in their classrooms and schools. Adding to the challenge, education deans must work with their constituencies to demonstrate ways in which they are preparing their graduates for success with an increasingly diverse PK-12 student population.

Moreover, unlike most other academic deanships, leaders of teacher and leadership education units must routinely contend with a litany of critical forces. These forces include

misguided legislators, news media intent on sensationalism, ever-changing federal and state regulations, and politically-motivated, well-financed educational reform entities that are intent on devaluing teacher and leadership education.

As a result, education deans must be vigilant about the ever-constant scrutiny, proactive in representing their academic units and institutions to the community, and committed to working with legislators, civic leaders, and potential donors to help move their institutions forward (Montez, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 2003). At the same time, they bear ultimate responsibility for all internal matters, most notably budgets, curriculum and program development, faculty and staff hiring and performance, and teacher and leadership candidate achievement. In serving as academic facilitators and intermediaries between presidential initiatives, administrative operations, faculty governance, and student needs, deans need to be equipped to work successfully with an extensive range of interests, individuals, and groups to promote the missions of their institution and academic unit (Rosser, Johnsrud, & Heck, 2003).

Given all of these challenges, the study of the education deanship and what is perceived as contributing to success in that key role qualifies as both timely and imperative. Such research, both qualitative and quantitative, can help standing deans reflect on their own characteristics and practices and perhaps adapt them to better effect. It can also assist prospective deans in understanding what capabilities figure to be necessary in increasing their leadership effectiveness should they assume these roles.

Purpose and Motivation for the Study

The present study is built upon a series of prior qualitative research efforts by using an empirical instrument, the *Dean's Performance Belief Survey*, to identify the importance of various essential views education deans hold about thinking, being, and acting on the job. Our motivation for conducting this national survey, hosted by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), was to contribute to the limited existing literature on how education deans in particular orient themselves toward a range of leadership beliefs, demeanors, and behaviors.

Even though we might acknowledge the important role of 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 previously identified revolving door syndrome represented by a single appointment of about five years (Gmelch et al.

1999; Robbins & Schmitt 1994), lack of formal preparation needed for serving effectively in a dean's role, and the lack of explicit eligibility criteria for professionals assuming such a position.

Current Literature on Deans

Most research conducted about academic 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; Enomoto & Matsuoka, 2007; Gardner, 1992; Geiger, 1989; Gmelch, 1999; Gmelch, Wolverton, M, Wolverton, & Sarros, 1999; Heald, 1982; Howey & Zimpher, 1990; Huffman-Joley, 1992; Jackson, 2000; Judge, 1982; Lessor, 2008; Martin, 2003; Riggs & Huffman, 1989; Thiessen & Howey, 1998; Wisniewski, 1977). One such line of research focuses on deans' positions in the middle of administrative hierarchies in colleges and universities; that is, the mediation they must do between administration and faculty (Dill, 1980; Gmelch, 2002; Gould, 1983; Kerr, 1998; McCarty & Reyes, 1987; McGannon, 1987; Morris, 1981; Salmen, 1971; Zimpher, 1995). They must help faculty move in directions that correspond to the overall mission of the institution, while arranging and organizing their personnel and material resources to accomplish objectives of immediate importance (Morsink, 1987). They must also promote quality teaching and scholarly activity, and participate in strategic planning/goal setting on behalf of both the university, their academic units, and in the case of education deans, PK-12 education. Academic deans across many disciplines might be expected to develop effective partnerships with community agencies, not-for-profit and for-profit organizations, and schools (Boyd, 2008; Bruess, McLean, & Sun, 2003; Hartley & Kecskemethy, 2008; Wimpelberg, 2009); however, that expectation is typically much greater for education deans.

Although it may appear that deans should possess certain ways of thinking, being, and acting in order to succeed within their contexts over time, we are unaware of qualitative or quantitative research by currently practicing education deans that reflect on their own practices or use their own self-reflective practices to examine their leadership tendencies and behaviors. Bowen's (1995) *The Wizard of Odds: Leadership Journeys of Education Deans* provided self-reflective narratives from three different education deans about their experiences in the role, but these deans had already stepped down from their positions. Studies of self-reflective practices across multiple deans are needed from those still employed in these positions to better understand patterns of thinking, being, and acting that are used frequently, as well as those that are critical to effectively addressing particular situations and challenges.

Previous Research and Theoretical Framework

The present research follows seven years of previous work involving six deans (one of us is from the original group) who participated in an introspective-retrospective analysis of their own patterns of behavior. 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. As a connoisseur appreciates a situation, she or he can also critique the same situation to help others see its subtle and not-so-subtle aspects. Through experience, a connoisseur learns to perceive patterns and make interpretations about specific interests or situations (Eisner 1998). When a connoisseur shares his or her views with others, she or he is serving as 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 make informed and committed judgments, a person needs to reflect on his or 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 our current group of three deans has had a variety of different experiences and challenges over time in the deanship, we have developed certain understandings and knowledge about the position that figure to enable us to both appreciate and critique the subtle and not-so-

subtle aspects of situations. Thus, we can presumably serve as aspirational connoisseurs and critics of our leadership experiences. Each of us has served in our respective position a minimum of 12 years. We followed traditional professional routes, first as tenured faculty and then assuming increasingly more administrative and leadership responsibilities before becoming deans. We have been, and continue to be, influenced by presidents, provosts, other deans, and non-academic university administrators. We have attended and continue to participate in institutes and seminars focused on leadership in higher education so that we might 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.

In applying Eisner's (1998) model to our research, we first used our understandings of situations and insights from experiences to identify themes, characteristics, and recommendations derived from self-created vignettes, meetings, and daily practices that describe the nature of our work with others. We discovered during the first six years of this work that deans rely mostly on interpersonal/negotiating skills, specifically working closely with others (Wepner, Hopkins, & Clark Johnson, 2011; Wepner, Hopkins, Clark Johnson, & Damico, 2012; Wepner, Henk, Clark Johnson, & Lovell, 2014).

We applied these findings to our most recent self-analysis (year 7) by documenting our experiences with others during 15 scheduled meetings (5 per dean): 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.

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., "Situations thought to be irresolvable in the short term might not be"). Our collective analysis of the combined 137 specific recommendations and lessons learned led us to identify 14 major recommendations that subsumed the full range of specific recommendations and lessons learned. Consistent with Eisner's (1998) model, we used our experiences in the deanship to perceive patterns and make interpretations about these numerous individual recommendations and lessons learned to develop a composite set of major recommendations that reflected superordinate ways of engaging in our work. We subsequently determined that we might use these major recommendations to develop a survey

instrument that engaged a broad sample of education deans in helping to determine a possible continuum of essentiality for thinking, being, and acting in the deanship.

Instrument Development and Administration

Statements were drafted and refined to create items representing each of the 14 major recommendations. Our aim was to develop scales for each recommendation that consisted of four items apiece, the original recommendation plus three parallel statements. The resulting 56 items were then randomly reordered to form the basis of our initial survey instrument. Major recommendations and example items appear in Table 1.

Table 1 – Major Recommendations with Corresponding Sample Survey Items

Major Recommendation	Example Survey Item
Be vigilant	Stay alert to developments that could impact your College or School.
Remain calm	Maintain your poise in all instances.
Value relationships and others’ achievements	Have regard for those in your professional circles.
Be strategic	Be planful and stay focused on outcomes.
Provide guidance and coaching	Provide guidance to those you encounter in your leadership role.
Plan ahead	Organize your thoughts and actions beforehand.
Seek help and learn from others	Pursue guidance from individuals within your networks.
Solve problems creatively	Use innovation to address challenges.
Follow through	Follow through on commitments.
Set limits	Draw the line on how much you commit to do.
Trust in yourself	Believe in your judgments and talents.
Persist	Stay the course.
Be prepared to deal with the consequences of difficult decisions	Ready yourself for pushback on your actions.
Don’t assume	Don’t take too much for granted.

In February of 2015, the survey was piloted with 43 education deans, associate and assistant deans, directors, and department chairs who attended a presentation of our Year 7 work, a self-analysis of our experiences with others in meetings. As with the final survey, the pilot group was asked to rate how essential each of the 56 statements was perceived to be for actual, effective performance in the role of education dean using a Likert scale. Response options for the items included: Non-Essential, Little Value, Some Value, Definite Value, and Essential. For each of the 14 categories of recommendations, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients approached or exceeded .70, and scale means indicated that all recommendations were regarded as having value. Despite the relatively small number of items per scale and limited sample size, reliability coefficients were deemed sufficiently acceptable, and all survey items were retained in what we titled, the *Deans Performance Belief Survey*.

In September, 2015, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education invited its membership to complete the *Deans Performance Belief Survey*. The organization first included a descriptive blog post about the survey and an embedded link to it in the electronic newsletter for members, *Ed Prep Matters*. The link contained a general request to education deans and directors to complete the survey. Additionally, members of Deans (n=875) and Dean-Alike (n=497) groups within AACTE, a total of 1372 individuals, were directly targeted with a separate e-mail message encouraging survey participation, and reminder messages appeared in follow-up issues of *Ed Prep Matters*.

Analysis and Interpretation

Three types of primary analyses were made on the data derived from the *Dean's Performance Beliefs Survey*. First, simple descriptive statistics were computed for all of the requested demographic information, which amounted to both nominal data and range data expressed in percentages. Second, Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities were computed for each of the 14 scales, and lastly, means and standard deviations were calculated for the scales, whose relative positioning represented the main interest of the study.

A total of 146 subjects responded to the survey, 110 of whom identified as deans representing a return rate of 12.6%. The remaining 36 respondents identified as another type of academic leader in the education unit (e.g., director, associate dean, and department chair). Because the deans were the true intended population, we were less concerned about the dean-alike return rate (7.2%), and limit our reporting here to the Deans-Only group. However, the entire set of respondents was

considered in both the determination of the scale reliability coefficients and in an exploratory follow-up analysis to estimate whether significant differences might exist between the 14 scale means.

For the Deans-Only group, gender turned out to be balanced, with 51% of the respondents identifying as female and 49% identifying as male. The age of the respondents could be considered as advanced with roughly two-thirds over 56 years old, and a full third in the 61 to 65 age range. Only 5% were younger than 45, and roughly one-third ranged from 46 to 55 years of age. Since deanships can be expected to occur later in the career of academics, these findings were not surprising.

However, although the deans presented as senior in age, more than two-thirds of them reported having been in their current position for five years or less, with roughly the same percentage at each of the years one through five (i.e., 18, 16, 14, 9, and 15, respectively). Another 25% or so of the respondents had served in their roles for between 6 and 15 years. We speculate that an appreciable number of retirements by baby boomers in dean's positions the past few years may have created a larger than normal amount of recent vacancies. We also entertain the possibility that a fair number of the present deans had been deans at other institutions or academic administrators of some type previously before moving to newer deans' roles. In tandem with a number of retirements, job advancement may have contributed to the relatively fewer number of years reported in their current positions.

In terms of institutional demographics, 56% of the respondents worked at public institutions, while 44% served at private ones. Enrollments at their institutions tended to be moderate to large, with 24% between 5001 and 10,000, 13% between 10,001 and 15,000, and 27% at more than 15,000. About one-fourth of those completing the survey hailed from institutions whose enrollments were less than 5,000, and although all geographic regions in the United States were represented in the sample, three-fourths were located along the expanse of the East Coast (both north and south) or the Midwest. Lastly, three quarters of the deans responding oversaw academic units consisting of five or fewer departments, and their enrollments tended to be relatively balanced between less than 600 (33%), between 601 and 1400 (31%), and from 1401 to 2600 (24%).

Before computing means and standard deviations, we wanted to determine if the 14 scales possessed ample measurement integrity. To do so, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients were calculated for each scale, and those results appear in Table 2.

Table 2 – Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficients by Scale

Scale	Alpha
Problem Solving	.88
Trust Yourself	.83
Set Limits	.83
Consequences	.83
Planning Ahead	.82
Calmness	.81
Seek Help	.81
Assumptions	.80
Guidance	.79
Persistence	.73
Be Strategic	.72
Vigilance	.71
Relationships	.67
Follow Through	.67

Typically, Alpha coefficients of .70 and beyond qualify as acceptable, and 12 of the scales on the *Deans Performance Belief Survey* exceeded that criterion. Eight of those reached .80 or higher, with the four others ranging between .71 and .79. Only the scales for Relationships and Follow Through fell slightly below the desirable threshold, both at .67. On balance, the instrument could be thought of as holding up quite well, especially considering that each scale consisted of only four items and that the sample size was modest.

With the scale reliabilities essentially in an acceptable range, greater confidence could be placed in the ensuing means and standard deviations. The results of those calculations are found in Table 3.

Table 3 – Means and Standard Deviations for the 14 Scales

Scale	Mean	SD
Cluster 1:		
Follow Through	4.62	.37
Vigilance	4.58	.43
Calmness	4.52	.48
Relationships	4.52	.41
Cluster 2:		
Trust Yourself	4.38	.51
Be Strategic	4.37	.47
Plan Ahead	4.33	.51
Problem Solving	4.28	.52
Persistence	4.28	.62
Consequences	4.22	.59
Assumptions	4.22	.57
Seek Help	4.20	.50
Cluster 3:		
Provide Guidance	4.03	.56
Set Limits	3.65	.76

Recall that respondents rated the relative importance of each of the 56 items using a Likert scale that consisted of five choices: Non-Essential, Little Value, Some Value, Definite Value and Essential. For the analysis, choices were assigned a value corresponding from 1 to 5, respectively.

An examination of the table reveals that all 14 scales were viewed as having at least Some Value or higher, and nearly all of the scales were regarded as having Definite Value. The means for Follow Through, Vigilance, Calmness, and Relationships were particularly high, representing ratings that fell more than halfway between Definite Value and Essential (from 4.52 to 4.62). The next apparent grouping ranged from 4.20 to 4.38, and included eight scales whose descending order of ratings, as noted in Table 3, ranged from Trusting Yourself to Seeking Help. A final grouping

consisted of the two lowest rated scales, Providing Guidance (which just reached the Definite Value level), and Setting Personal Limits (which fell between the Some Value and Definite Value levels).

Our approach to interpreting these results eventually led to viewing the scale means as falling roughly into clusters. More specifically, we examined the difference between each scale mean and the next lower one, looking for noteworthy gaps. In only two instances did we note differences of .10 or more. That is, we saw separation occurring between the means of Calmness and Relationship near the bottom of the high end (4.52) and that of Trusting Yourself (a difference of .14), which seemed to mark the beginning of a second cluster. We also saw separation between Seeking Help at the seeming bottom of the second cluster and Providing Guidance (a difference of .17), the presumed beginning of a third cluster. Additional justification for our clustering was scale variance; the top group of scales showed the least amount of variance, the middle cluster generally showed a good deal more, and the bottom cluster, especially the Set Limits scale, evidenced a notably larger standard deviation. Moreover, it should be noted the means of the scales within each cluster were all sufficiently close that they should be regarded as being of equal import and that no order of priority should be assumed or assigned. In other words, the scale means in each cluster were similar enough that they might be considered a mixture of highly related elements, even though there were differences of .18 and .38 between the highest and lowest means in the middle cluster and bottom clusters respectively.

The top cluster (i.e., the four highest means) appears to be a mix of pragmatics and affect. This constellation of factors suggests the dean following through on what needs to be done by monitoring progress and acting in a calm manner that is sensitive to the relationships she or he has with others. The middle cluster of eight scales appears, as an assemblage, to be a blend of proactivity and professional qualities. Here the dean must trust her or his capacity to do the job by being strategic, planful, persistent, braced for ramifications, and mindful of the unexpected, while willing to seek help from others when necessary or beneficial.

The bottom cluster consists of two factors that appear to be matters of necessity or discretion. Deans may see providing guidance and coaching others as outstripping available time and regarded as possibly unwelcome by faculty, staff, and direct administrative reports. They may also be so busy with the pragmatics of the job that they do not have time to provide such guidance, especially if doing so could possibly incur negative feelings or resentment. As far as setting limits, being effective in the dean's role requires so much effort that trying to do so in a way that achieves a work-life balance could be both challenging and precarious in the face of stakeholders' significant

expectations of the dean's performance. Still, both factors were viewed as valuable to effective performance as a dean.

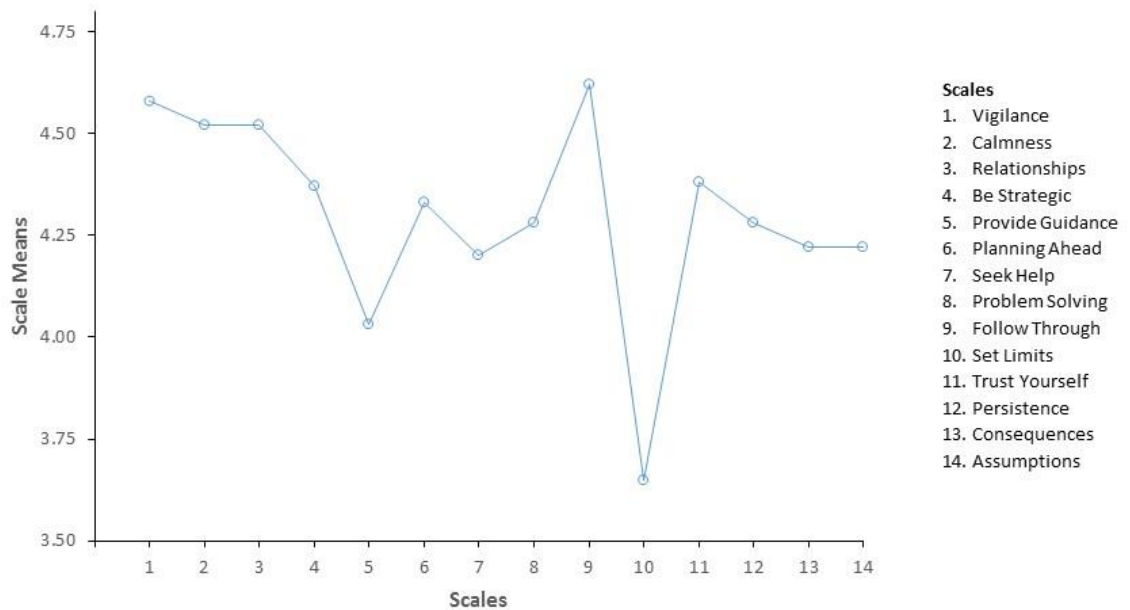
Merely examining the mean scores of the scales and noting the "distances" between them does not really indicate that significant differences exist among them. It is probably fair to say that differences might exist between the very highest and lowest scale mean scores, but even that assertion is technically tenuous. Because we had respondents in administrative positions other than dean (N=36), we were able to perform an exploratory analysis of variance to help us with this issue. That analysis was treated as a 2 by 14 repeated measures design, where Group was a between-subjects variable (deans-only and all others) and Scale (the means for individual respondents) represented the within-subjects variable. The analysis revealed no significant main effect for Group ($F=.027, p > .05$), or for the interaction of Group and Scale ($F=2.08, p > .05$). Neither finding surprised us, because the comparison group of administrators could largely be expected to be influenced by the scale categories in a way similar to the deans. It is noteworthy that there was, in fact, a significant difference indicated among the 14 scale means ($F=41.36, p < .001$). These results should be viewed with some caution, however, as not all assumptions of the ANOVA model may have been met, and because the *Deans Performance Belief Survey* is still evolving. It was nonetheless interesting that multiple comparison *post hoc* tests revealed the 14 scales clustered quite closely into the three groupings we had earlier surmised (see Table 3).

Summary and Limitations

This survey study suggests that education deans found all of the factors represented on the instrument to be at least reasonably important to their work. In that sense, the resulting data approach something on the order of a ceiling effect. Accordingly, when the 14 scale means are graphed on a number line that includes all five of the Likert options, they look so tightly compacted that the prospect of differences appears negligible. However, if the number line is narrowed to include only the options for Some Value, Definite Value, and Essential (since there were almost no responses of Non-Essential or Little Value), the differentiation between our proposed clusters becomes more apparent (see Figure 1).

Although rank-ordering the 14 scales would clearly be desirable in providing insights into the dean's relative perceptions of the value of each construct, the current methodology does not permit hard generalizations to that end. Rather, we were essentially limited to examining the data and surmising which means could reasonably be thought to differ from one another. It does not seem to

Figure 1 – Deans Performance Belief Survey Scale Means



be too much of a stretch, however, to suspect that the four scale means in the top cluster (Follow Through, Vigilance, Calmness, and Relationships) differ at least from the lowest mean in the bottom cluster (Setting Limits) and likely the second lowest mean (Providing Guidance) as well. Trying to ferret out possible differences between the eight scales in the middle cluster, though, is difficult to do.

A second limitation is the size of the sample. A larger group of respondents (250 more survey completers) would have bolstered the confidence we might have in the scale mean scores and the Cronbach’s Alpha reliability estimates, and allowed for a factor analysis of the scales. Still, we argue that learning what 110 education deans believe about what is important in the role is potentially instructive.

A third limitation relates to the fact that the 14 scale categories were derived from the professional lives of only three education deans, even though their experiences examined through earlier qualitative studies involving three additional deans were extraordinarily similar. Moving forward, we anticipate expanding the number of categories in the survey based upon feedback we received from 133 participants at the inaugural Dean’s Summit at the 2016 AACTE annual

conference. Future scales under consideration include: honesty, flexibility, communication, transparency, sense of humor, vision, advocacy, delegation, and listening.

Implications

Notwithstanding these limitations, we found notable value in surveying education deans to discover the extent to which the 14 recommendations that we had personally derived from previous research were valued by others in these roles. The education deans' range of responses (from pragmatics/affect to proactivity/professional qualities to necessity/discretion) revealed how relatively inexperienced, yet older deans from essentially moderately sized institutions interpreted their roles for thinking, being, and acting on the job.

In short, five overarching conclusions might be drawn from the education deans' interpretation of the survey's elements. These conclusions represent an overall approach to effectiveness in the role of dean that incorporates essential aspects of the 14 recommendations forming the basis of this research.

1. *Getting the job done is the first priority.* Education deans seem to believe that they need to focus on getting the job done above all else. They need to focus on the tasks and responsibilities at hand, and complete them, before they can move on to other initiatives. They seem to understand that their credibility with their constituency depends on their ability to prove that they can be depended on to do what they say they are going to do.
2. *Do the job in a way that works for you and others.* At the same time that they believe they must get the job done, education deans seem to trust themselves enough to do the job in a way that is self-satisfying and hopefully pleasing to their colleagues as well. In other words, they do not have to succumb to external pressures, but rather can use their own and others' ideas to accomplish the task.
3. *Be prepared for repercussions.* Education deans seem to understand that, even with their vigilant and strategic efforts to work with their constituencies, they still need to be prepared to deal with the consequences of difficult decisions. They cannot assume that others will not push back, and need to be ready for resistance from unanticipated sources and respond to it.
4. *Acknowledge that there are some things you can't do because of the nature of the job.* Education deans seem to believe that they often do not have the time necessary to seek

help from others or provide guidance and coaching to others. They do not seem to have as a high priority setting personal limits or drawing the line on how much they can commit to do, which probably means that they have too many responsibilities to address on a daily basis. As one respondent shared with us, “I go into work each day with a To-Do list, and leave at the end of the day with the same items on my To-Do list, because of all the other tasks, problems, and challenges that unfold throughout the day.”

5. *Think and act strategically.* Education deans recognize that, while they must attend to tasks that demand immediate attention, they must avoid being distracted from their ultimate goals. Success in the role and success of their school or college require them to maintain a focus on critical outcomes. By extension, then, they must engage in careful planning to achieve those outcomes step by step.

We recognize that the data represent what deans themselves perceived to be important versus either what others think or what truly matters in effective performance (although it is not clear that the latter can be known or agreed upon). It is, though, a hopefully noteworthy step in understanding deans’ beliefs and understandings of ways in which they must approach their jobs as leaders of their schools and colleges.

Whereas previous research focused mostly on the biographical, structural, and contextual characteristics of deans as middle managers in the higher education hierarchy (see, for example, Gmelch, 2002), this study expands the available literature by offering insights into a range of education deans’ self-reflective practices and characteristics. Using our own array of experiences and understandings of the life of a dean, as aspirational connoisseurs and critics in the tradition of Eisner (1998), we developed a set of 14 recommendations and tested their importance with several other practicing deans using a survey format. Even with notable variations in personal characteristics, professional experiences, and institutional situations, the recommendations around thinking, being and doing on the job resonated with the deans who responded. Further study of such self-reflective practices figures to contribute to our understanding of the key capabilities needed to serve as effective leaders.

A next possible step, beyond expanding and refining our survey, would be to tap the perceptions of dean stakeholders at all levels--direct reports, administrative peers, central administrators, alumni, donors, school and community leaders, and even trustees. Doing so will help to determine further the essential characteristics that others believe education deans must

evidence as leaders to both maintain stability and catalyze change in a professional field that is seemingly forever in flux.

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