

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP AT A  
HISTORICALLY BAPTIST COLLEGE:  
A FRAME ANALYSIS

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A FRAME ANALYSIS

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University of Nebraska, 2008

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This case study sought to identify Leadership Frames (Bolman & Deal, 2003) that were espoused by the President of a historically Baptist College, and to ascertain if there was leader-follower congruence in the perception of those Leadership Frames. Survey research, a structured interview, and focus groups were used to assess leader-follower congruence in the perception of presidential leadership.

Research participants were the President, Senior Administrators, Faculty Members, and Trustees at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. The Leadership Orientation Questionnaires (LOQ, Self and Others, 1990) were used with permission to secure relevant quantitative information on four Frames (Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic). The interest was in learning whether the dependent variable parties (President, Senior Administration, Faculty Members, and Board of Trustees) interpreted the President's actions (independent variable) similarly.

Structured interviews, first with the President of Samford University and then two focus groups composed of the institution's Faculty and Trustees identified (a) striking successes Samford University had experienced under the leadership of the sitting President, and (b) leadership

characteristics or values attributed to those successes. Qualitative findings supported and clarified information gleaned from the survey responses on the President's use of multiple leadership Frames. However, the findings were inconclusive concerning leader-follower congruence as to which Frame best described the President's leadership. This research allowed for stating that persons entrusted with the responsibilities of leading Baptist institutions of higher education, and perhaps other denominationally related institutions, should consider learning how their leadership style is perceived by relevant constituencies, and give careful consideration to employing different approaches when circumstances so dictate.

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PREVIEW

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

John Donne, a great poet of the Renaissance era, wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself..." recognizing that people do not thrive when isolated from one another. Although there were necessary times of isolation in seeing this dissertation to fruition, I could have never completed this doctoral program without the tremendous support I have received both professionally and personally.

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PREVIEW

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Baylor University President Robert Sloan is a self-proclaimed lightning rod. He stepped down June 1, 2005, concluding one of the stormiest periods in the 160-year history of the nation's largest Baptist University. Sloan assumed the presidency in 1995 on a promise of being a uniter, but critics would eventually accuse him of being a divider and call for his dismissal. In an 18 month span, he survived at least three attempts by the institution's Board of Regents to remove him (Ackerman, 2005).

Controversy over Sloan's leadership flared after the Regents approved Baylor 2012, the University's ten-year strategy to become one of the top schools of its kind in the nation by blending an emphasis on espousing a strong Christian faith with the highest academic standards. Supporters praised Baylor 2012 and Sloan's vision for conceiving such a plan. But opponents soon surfaced to criticize Sloan's implementation of the plan, its cost, and some went on record condemning the plan's components.

Sloan's leadership style drew the greatest criticism. In one of two no-confidence votes, Baylor's faculty senate said his presidency has produced "a chilling work environment, a climate characterized by distrust, anxiety, intimidation and favoritism, as well as profound concerns about the sanctity of academic freedom and professional

standards" (Ackerman, 2005, p. 2). Others viewed Sloan as a leader who was misunderstood by his critics and a casualty of his vision. Baylor University Board Chairman Will Davis stated, "the board unanimously supports Baylor 2012, but felt that, because of dissatisfaction with Dr. Sloan's leadership style, it was time to make a change" (Ackerman, 2005, p. 1). Pressed to list the things he would do differently if he had his decade-long tenure to do over again, Sloan said, "We don't have time to list them all" (Knox, 2005, p. 1).

#### *Louisiana College*

Earlier, the same week that Sloan resigned as president of Baylor, the trustees of Louisiana College elected Joseph Aguillard to be president, over objections from most of his faculty colleagues and wide-spread student and alumni opposition. His election by a vote of 17-13 was the most recent chapter in months of instability and conflict at that four-year Baptist liberal arts college. Counting Aguillard, since April 2004 Louisiana College has had three board chairmen and three presidents - perhaps four, if one counted Malcolm Yarnell, a theologian and educator who was elected in November 2004 but withdrew before signing a contract (Nolan, 2005).

The Southern Association for Colleges and Schools (SACS) leveled a serious threat at Louisiana College, placing it on academic probation in December 2004. A team of investigators found the college "was unduly influenced

by the Louisiana Inerrancy Fellowship, the preeminent conservative political movement inside the Louisiana Baptist Convention" (Nolan, 2005, p. 1). Some members of the institution's faculty stated that the trustees carrying out the movement's agenda were prone to micromanaging the college's affairs.

Following his election, Aguiard said, "We'll be coming together as a family, as a community, to understand what our mission, our belief statement, our identity is...There's work to be done" (Nolan, 2005, p. 3). At this point in time it might be too soon to render a verdict on his efforts to coalesce the institution's community, but skepticism abounds.

#### *Defining Church-related Colleges*

Numerous colleges and universities in the history of higher education in America were founded under some sort of Christian patronage. Harvard, William and Mary, and Yale, the first three colleges established in the British colonies of America, were established as adjuncts of their respective churches (Geiger, 1999). Many of the early institutions, which still exist, now claim little or no relationship with a church or denomination. Even on many campuses, listed by denominations as their affiliates there often is concern expressed about the authenticity and depth of the relationship with a recognized religious body.

As many Christian colleges and universities, long governed by trustees appointed by denominational governing

bodies, have redefined their relationships and gained their own self-perpetuating boards, the question has been raised as to what constitutes the Christian dimension of higher education. Particularly in recent years, there has been confusion pertaining to a definition of Christian higher education. Questions surfacing address topics such as: if the Christian colleges are different, how do they differ, why are they different, and what defines such difference?

During the last forty years, researchers have developed taxonomies to classify the broad scope of church-related colleges and universities. Four taxonomies are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs: Patillo & Mackenzie (1966), Pace (1972), Cunnigim (1978), and Sandin (1990).

*Patillo and Mackenzie*

Patillo and Mackenzie's (1966) crafted a fourfold taxonomy of church-related colleges and universities: 1) Defender of the Faith Colleges, 2) Non-Affirming Colleges, 3) Free Colleges, and 4) Church-Related Universities. The purpose of Defender of the Faith Colleges (first category) "is to provide an education in the arts and sciences for persons who will later take their places as leaders (lay or clerical) in a particular religious tradition" (Patillo & Mackenzie, 1966, p. 192). Students and faculty at such institutions typically are drawn almost entirely from the sponsoring group or denomination.

The Non-Affirming College (second category), though

church related, gave relatively little formal attention to religion. "The catalogue and other publications make brief mention of the church affiliation, but the statement of educational purposes is likely to omit any reference to religion or to speak in more general terms of moral and spiritual values" (Patillo & Mackenzie, 1966, p. 193).

Free Christian Colleges (third category) were described as free "because it does not control thought; Christian because it has a definite commitment" (Patillo and Mackenzie, 1966, p. 194). It sought to combine the chief assets of the other two models while attempting to avoid their liabilities, viewing the relationship between religious faith and the liberal arts as complementary.

The Church-Related University (fourth category) had a larger and more diverse student population from a broader geographic range. Religiously, the church-related university was pluralistic and "the relationship of the university to its church is tenuous" (Patillo & Mackenzie, 1966, p 196).

*Pace*

Pace's (1972) classification of Christian higher education institutions also had four categories: 1) institutions that had Protestant roots but no longer were Protestant in a legal sense; 2) institutions that remained nominally related to Protestantism but likely were on the verge of disengagement; (3) institutions that were established by major Protestant denominations and

maintained a connection with the sponsoring church; and (4) institutions that were affiliated with the Evangelical, Fundamentalist, and Interdenominational Christian Churches. Pace (1972) reported that institutional uniqueness and strength of religious association were related closely. That is, the most distinctive church-related institutions, and the ones most likely to survive and thrive, were those that maintained the strongest ties with their respective affiliated denominations.

#### *Cunninggim*

Cunninggim (1978) provided a third taxonomy of church-related colleges and universities. It was a continuum consisting of three descriptive institutional groupings: 1) the Consonant College was an ally with its denomination, but spoke infrequently of its church affiliation. It operated independently with little or no concern to create or follow religious criteria. 2) The Proclaiming College was a witness to its denominational relationship and proudly admitted its affiliation with the church. However, the expression of this witness varied among church-related colleges. 3) The Embodying College reflected a sponsoring denomination and sought to accentuate denominational faith and values in every aspect of institutional life.

#### *Sandin*

Sandin's (1990) classification, building on the prior three taxonomies, included four categories of religiously affiliated institutions. 1) The Pervasively Religious



Institution, as its name suggested, was one in which every facet of institutional operations was penetrated by the central Christian convictions. 2) The Religiously Supportive Institution was shaped by an affiliation with a denomination, but it did not try to centralize religious values in all institutional operations. 3) The Nominally Church-Related Institution "may view its church-relatedness as an important symbol of historic associations, but not as a controlling value in its present educational mission" (Sandin, 1990, p.29). Such institutions, while emphasizing independence, retained certain values that might be associated with their denominational heritage. 4) Independent Institutions were those with historical religious ties, but currently confessed to no religious sponsorship of any kind.

#### Statement of the Problem

Since 1986, more than a dozen historically Baptist Colleges have loosened ties with their respective state conventions. Burtchaell (1998) explored the dynamics of church-related school relations through case studies of 17 prominent colleges with diverse ecclesial origins and explained how and why they tended to wither over time. "In many of these stories the critical turn away from Christian accountability was taken under the clear initiative of a single president..." (Burtchaell, 1998, p.826).

Church-related institutions have been exceedingly vulnerable to societal shifts and educational trends. The

Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools is comprised of forty-eight colleges and universities, two Bible schools and one academy. The forty-eight colleges are located in 17 different states. The combined fall 2006 undergraduate enrollment at these member institutions was 100,307 compared to a fall 2005 enrollment of 105,343. The largest of these institutions was Baylor University with a fall 2006 undergraduate enrollment of over 11,800 students. The smallest was Yellowstone Baptist College with an undergraduate enrollment of 52. At the time this research was conducted, 18 of the forty-eight ASBCS member colleges and universities had presidents who had served 10 or more years at their respective institutions. Four institutions (Charleston Southern University, Mercer University, Samford University, and University of the Cumberlands) had presidents who had served more than 20 years.

Thus 26 institutions had presidents with less than 10 years of service. But when juxtaposed against: the recent tumultuous tenures of presidents at historically Baptist colleges, the complexity pertaining to the definition of Christian higher education, and the growing trend of Baptist Colleges toward loosening ties with their respective state conventions, the issue of presidential leadership in a historically Baptist College emerges as a legitimate issue to study. Guthrie (1992) observed, "...for these institutions to remain not only visible but also vibrant as they cultivate distinctive niches within the

postsecondary arena, their administrative and academic leaders will require new frameworks and strategies for understanding and facing the educational enterprise" (p. 15).

Bolman and Deal's (1990) Leadership Orientation Questionnaire (LOQ) (Appendix K) is a survey instrument that secures information on a person's abilities and style of management, assuring quality activities, and team building. It addresses four frames (personal values governing how a person approaches problem solving) and provides insights into how an individual likely would employ one or more of the frames. A number of educational leadership studies involving presidents and other senior level administrators (Bensimon, 1989, Redman, 1991, Bowen, 2004, Cantu, 1997, DeFrank-Cole, 2003, Gilson, 1994) reported the LOQ to be a reliable instrument for the kinds of information sought.

Bensimon (1989) used the frame theory to conduct quantitative research at 32 colleges and universities to learn if institutional presidents used single or multiple frames for demonstrating good leadership. In her sample, more than a third of the presidents used only one frame. Single-frame presidents tended to be less experienced, relying mainly on structural or human resource perspectives. Presidents who relied solely on the structural frame were especially likely to be viewed as ineffective leaders. Bensimon concluded a president who

used multiple frames or vantage points likely would be more effective than one who dealt with problems from a single perspective.

For this research, an in-depth case study was conducted at Samford University, a historically Baptist College in Birmingham, Alabama. Samford is the largest private university in Alabama with over 4,400 students. This institution was an appropriate selection for the following reasons: 1) the University has a rich history of presidential leadership for an extended period of time and the University's current President at the time of this study, Thomas E. Corts, had provided leadership for twenty-two years; and, 2) although Samford University's Board of Trustees became self-perpetuating in 1994, in what was stated as an effort to protect the integrity of the institution in the midst of denominational political struggles, the University has maintained a strong relationship with the Alabama Baptist State Convention and continues to be a member school of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools.

#### Purpose of the Study

Presidential leadership in colleges and universities has claimed the attention of various researchers (Cohen & March, 1974, Bolman & Deal, 1984, Bensimon, Neumann & Birnbaum, 1989, Bocock, Scott, Smith & Bargh, 2000, and Padilla, 2005,). Those researchers sought to answer the question of who determined effective leadership, what

qualities were present in effective leaders, and how those qualities were exhibited to others. Little has been written about Baptist Colleges and minimal attention has been given to Baptist College presidents.

This study sought to identify leadership frames (Bolman & Deal, 2003) that were espoused by the President of a historically Baptist College, and to ascertain if there was leader-follower congruence in the perception of those leadership frames. Survey research, interviews, and focus groups were used to assess leader-follower congruence in the perception of presidential leadership.

#### Research Questions

The overriding question for this study was whether a long-standing President of a historically Baptist institution of higher education perceived his leadership style similarly to the following persons at the institution: 1) Senior Administration; 2) Faculty members, and 3) Trustees. The specific questions were:

1. Does the institution President's leadership style coincide with the Senior Administration's perceptions as measured by the LOQ?
2. Does the institution President's leadership style coincide with the Faculty's perceptions as measured by the LOQ?
3. Does the institution President's leadership style coincide with the Trustees' perceptions as measured by the LOQ?

### Method of Procedure

This case study collected survey data from three constituent groups and the sitting President. The analyses of survey data was augmented by qualitative research gathered through focus group and selected structured interviews, as well as artifacts such as the University magazine and website. The survey used was the Leadership Orientation Questionnaires (both Self and Other), an instrument developed by Bolman and Deal (1990) to assess leadership characteristics of a president or manager of an organization.

Qualitative information was gathered through the use of focus group interviews with selected members of Samford University's Senior Administration, Faculty members, and its Trustees. A structured interview also was conducted with the President of Samford University. Triangulation of data (Creswell, 1998, Hatch, 2002) allowed for ensuring reliability of information provided to the research questions posed.

The survey population included the University President, five Senior Administrators, 342 Faculty Members and 50 Trustees of Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. The individual interviews and focus groups involved a smaller representation of the survey population.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms related to this study:

1. Baptist college - four-year institutions which are

member schools of the Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools and historically have been related to the Baptist denomination.

2. Leadership - refers to the social process of influence demonstrated by one person and affecting the behavior of many others (Yukl, 1994).
3. Leadership frames - the distinctive cognitive lens that influences what leaders see and do in regards to decision making and problem solving.
4. Structural frame - views organizations as a hierarchical system of management with clearly established lines of authority.
5. Political frame - views organizations as formal and informal groups competing for power to control institutional processes and outcomes.
6. Human resource frame - views organizational members as the primary resource of the organization, emphasizing human need and how organizations can be equipped to meet them.
7. Symbolic frame - views organizations as cultures with shared values in which leaders serve primarily as facilitators of an ongoing process.
8. President - the chief executive officer of the college or university.
9. Senior Administration - members of the college president's cabinet or senior staff. Officers such as the Provost, Vice President of Academic Affairs,

Vice President of Student Development, Vice President of Business and Finance, Vice President for Enrollment Management, and Vice President for University Relations are commonly selected to serve on the president's primary advisory and administrative team.

10. Faculty - Deans of academic programs and full-time faculty and instructional members.

11. Trustees - members of a board elected or appointed to direct the funds and policy of an institution.

#### Delimitations

The delimitations of a study refer to the populations where generalizations may be inferred safely. The following delimitations related to this study:

1. The study was limited to the President, members of the Senior Administration, full-time Faculty and Trustees at Samford University in the 2005-2006 Academic Year.
2. The findings are pertinent for leader-follower congruence as it pertained to the perception of leadership qualities of a Baptist College president. Further restrictions were specific to the President of Samford University and members of his Senior Administration, full-time Faculty, and the institution's Trustees.
3. Persons not directly associated with Samford University might have provided relevant and