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Article abstract

Interpretive and narrative research approaches, the experiences of academic administrators other than deans, chairs, and presi-dents, and academic identity work beyond graduate students and beginning professors are all areas that are underrepresented in the literature on higher educational administration. This article builds on recent narrative research by applying higher educational admin-istrative theories as interpretive lenses to propose a model for helping to understand the development and application of associate deans' academic identities. Among the findings were that academic identities helped explain associate deans' approaches to their roles, their views of their surrounding organizations, and their reasons for assuming the role. Further, the associate deans who partic-ipated in this research did not experience their transition to the role as an identity crisis in the ways typically described and assumed by higher educational leadership scholars. Instead, they drew upon their well-established academic identities and, in keeping with the nascent research on academic identity work, were intentional in their efforts to maintain their academic identities.

IT "MADE ME WHO I AM": USING INTERPRETIVE AND NARRATIVE RESEARCH TO DEVELOP A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING ASSOCIATE DEANS' APPLICATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC IDENTITY

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Abstract

Interpretive and narrative research approaches, the experiences of academic administrators other than deans, chairs, and presidents, and academic identity work beyond graduate students and beginning professors are all areas that are underrepresented in the literature on higher educational administration. This article builds on recent narrative research by applying higher educational administrative theories as interpretive lenses to propose a model for helping to understand the development and application of associate deans' academic identities. Among the findings were that academic identities helped explain associate deans' approaches to their roles, their views of their surrounding organizations, and their reasons for assuming the role. Further, the associate deans who participated in this research did not experience their transition to the role as an identity crisis in the ways typically described and assumed by higher educational leadership scholars. Instead, they drew upon their well-established academic identities and, in keeping with the nascent research on academic identity work, were intentional in their efforts to maintain their academic identities.

Keywords: narrative, interpretive, identity, leadership, organization, university, higher education, administration, dean, chair, academe

Résumé

Les approches de recherche interprétative et narrative, les expériences des administrateurs universitaires autres que les doyens et présidents, ainsi que les travaux sur l'identité universitaire au-delà de celle des étudiants des cycles supérieurs et des professeurs débutants sont autant de domaines sous-représentés dans la littérature sur l'administration de l'enseignement supérieur. Cet article s'appuie sur une recherche narrative récente et applique des théories sur l'administration de l'enseignement supérieur comme lentilles interprétatives afin de suggérer un modèle pour mieux comprendre le développement et l'application de l'identité universitaire des doyens associés. Entre autres résultats, il s'avère que cette dernière aide à expliquer les approches adoptées par les doyens associés relativement à leur rôle, leur point de vue quant aux organisations connexes et ce qui les motive dans leur poste. De plus, les doyens associés qui ont participé à la recherche n'ont pas vécu la transition vers ce poste comme une crise identitaire, contrairement à ce que décrivent et supposent généralement les chercheurs qui se penchent sur la haute administration universitaire. Plutôt, ces doyens associés ont tiré parti de leur identité universitaire bien établie et, conformément à la recherche émergente sur le travail d'identité universitaire, ils ont déployé des efforts intentionnels pour conserver cette dernière.

Mots-clés : narration, interprétation, identité, leadership, organisation, université, enseignement supérieur, administration, doyen, président, monde universitaire

Introduction

Within higher educational literature there is a lack of research on the experiences of academic administrators in roles other than president, dean, or chair (Zodikoff & Pardasani, 2020). Recent research explored the experiences of five associate deans, which is a position among these underrepresented roles and is located close to the nexus of the university (Stovin, 2021). However, rather than focusing on the organizational impact these leaders had, this research began with a holistic interest in them as individuals. Given this, and the dearth of research falling within interpretivist and narrative traditions in higher educational literature (Lavigne, 2022), an interpretive and narrative approach was used to co-construct five in-depth career-life stories.

Narrative and interpretive research approaches are appropriate and commonly used when one is interested in individuals and their experiences (Ellis, 2006). This interest in who an individual is also necessarily invokes matters of identity. Although a substantive body of research on academic identity exists, much of it explores doctoral students' and beginning professors' experiences rather than those of more senior faculty who choose to become academic administrators. Among the interpretive findings in each of the stories are descriptions (i.e., a synthesis) of these five associate deans' complex academic identities (Stovin, 2021).

The purpose of this article is to begin to lay a foundation for future research on the ongoing development and application of academic identity by academic administrators. Using higher educational administration theories as interpretive lenses, this article considers how gaining an understanding of associate deans' academic identities can help to better understand their approaches to their roles and their views of their organizational surroundings. Taking a high-level view that combines the interpretive findings from each narrative account and the themes found from looking across the narratives in Stovin (2021) with three relevant higher educational administration theories, a model is proposed that will be helpful for future research to explore in greater detail the dynamics of associate deans' academic identity development and application. To this end, I provide below a brief overview of background literature, a high-level review of the multiple theories used to understand and frame participants' experiences, an introduction to the interpretive and narrative theory and method used, some key findings, a discussion of how these fit together into a useful model, and suggestions for future research.

Background Literature

There are very few studies focused on the experiences of faculty members who serve as associate dean (Zodikoff & Pardasani, 2020), which is an area that is "under-researched and not well-understood" (Floyd & Preston, 2019, p. 431). Given the paucity of such studies, I included the nearby literature on deans and chairs in my survey and found that the associate dean literature mirrors this more expansive and older body of research.

Associate deans are considered by Kallenberg (2015) to be part of a group of "academic middle managers…hierarchically positioned between the strategic and operational level" (p. 203). In Canada, the position of associate dean is quite varied on matters such as how one comes into the position (i.e., appointed or elected), whether it is primarily administrative or academic in nature, and whether or not one remains a member of the faculty association once appointed. Commonly, though, associate deans, like deans, exist organizationally in an interstitial space:

> If it is necessary for a dean to be firmly located within the academic fabric of a faculty, to be an academic colleague, fellow teacher and researcher.... So it is also important that the dean is not isolated from the central decision making of the institution (Shattock, 2010, p. 88)

Unlike deans, however, associate deans face the challenge of working in two different interstitial spaces because, in addition to being caught between faculty and executive-level administrators, they can also be caught between the dean's office and their academic colleagues. Despite this complexity, and the importance of the roles associate deans carry, they "tend to be an overlooked group within the leadership of a university" (Sayler et al., 2019, p. 1119).

The limited body of research focused on associate deans falls into four areas: a critical point of transition, tensions in roles and identities, reasons for administrative service, and the perceived need for professional development (Zodikoff & Pardasani, 2020). The first two areas were most relevant, which generally refer, respectively, to administrative challenges (Aitken & O'Carroll, 2020; Sayler et al., 2019; Thornton et al., 2018) and to cultural or identity challenges (Martin et al., 2020; Mason & de la Harpe, 2020) experienced when moving into the role.

The higher educational administration literature on deans and chairs often claims that moving from the field of academic practice to the field of academic administration

is a particularly difficult one. Much of the administrative transition challenge arises because deans occupy an especially visible place in the academy, in full view of their peers and others while learning administrative aspects of the role (Bright & Richards, 2001; Gmelch et al., 2011). As Tucker and Bryan (1988) emphasize, "the dean must learn the art of management" (p. 3).

The same literature tends to claim that new academic administrators also endure unexpected pressure for, and subsequently experience, significant changes in their identities. Bright and Richards (2001), for example, state that it is "clear that a dean inevitably faces real changes in responsibilities, point of view, and professional life in general. Accepting that need to change can be a very difficult mental shift" (p. 51). Further claims are made that individual change is necessary as one changes academic administrative roles (Hendrickson et al., 2013) and that this often involves identity crises (Gmelch et al., 2011). Ultimately, according to Gmelch and Miskin (2004), there are "metamorphic changes that occur as one transforms from an academic to an academic leader" (p. 6).

Beyond the perceived challenges and changes experienced with assuming an academic administrative role, a substantive body of literature exists on the concept of academic identity (elaborated upon in the next section) and on academic identity development. The focus of the latter literature tends to be on doctoral students (Ai, 2017; Murphy & Wibberley, 2017; Seaborne, 2020; Xu & Grant, 2020) and beginning faculty (Billot & King, 2017; Thomas & Reinertsen, 2019) and reports on the significant challenges of academic identity work experienced by both groups during these critical periods of transition. There is, however, an absence of research on academic identity work that demonstrates substantive changes in more senior faculty members' identities as is postulated in the higher educational leadership literature. Instead, recent research indicates that faculty at this level of academic administration engage in a struggle to maintain their academic identity (Dugas et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2020; Shams, 2019). For some, this struggle involves the use of their academic identity as a means of resistance against the forces of managerialism or new public management (Carter, 2020; Lust et al., 2019). Other than this resistance, current research on academic identity work does not consider how more senior faculty might draw upon their more established academic identities when assuming new roles.

The research conducted by Stovin (2021) fits into the body of research on academic identity. The intent was to better understand: (1) who these associate deans are and how their academic identities may or may not have changed, (2) how these associate deans approached their leadership roles, and (3) how these associate deans viewed their organizational surroundings. It was necessary, therefore, to gain an understanding of participants' beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and values, how these developed over time, and how these were translated into decision making and action. According to Ellis (2006), "research participants can best reveal [this] sense-making and [their] experience narratively" (p. 112). This article extends the research by taking a high-level view of the narratives produced and applying higher educational administrative theories as interpretive lenses to develop a model for better understanding how associate deans' academic identities are developed and applied.

Theories Used as Lenses for Sense-Making

In interpretive inquiry "we begin with an openness to behold or contemplate life in its wholeness and complexity" (Ellis, 1998, p. 19), we set aside our a priori interests in favour of participants' interests, we are actively "in" the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), and we refrain "from imposing [taxonomies or classification systems] reductively" (Ellis, 2006, p. 115). That is, an interpretivist researcher does not make an a priori choice of a particular explanatory theory and then proceed to gather data with the intent to confirm or revise said theory. Instead, one brings multiple theories, beliefs, perspectives, and skills that might prove helpful for assisting participants in creating and sharing their narrative accounts (if using a narrative approach) and for interpreting, or making meaning of, their stories. As Thomas Greenfield said,

> what is needed…is a knowledge of how people in a social situation construe it, what they see as its significant features, and how they act within it. Such knowledge can only come from the *interpretation* [emphasis added] of particular experiences in specific situations. (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993, p. 21)

Such an interest in an individual's "experience and sense-making situates one in the constructivist paradigm with a commitment to hermeneutical and/or narrative approaches to research" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Ellis, 2006, p. 112).

Three bodies of higher educational administration

literature were used that align, respectively, with the three interests above: (1) academic identity theory, (2) higher educational leadership theory, and (3) higher educational organization theory. The latter two sets of theories can be considered, at their core, to be dichotomous in nature and reflect two fundamentally different perspectives (Chaffee, 1984, 1989; Drucker, 1974/2008; Levin, 2000; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Walker, 1979). With respect to higher educational organization theory, one perspective is the bureaucratic view and the other is the cultural view. Individuals taking the first perspective tend to believe that universities should be administered using standardized and ubiquitous business approaches because they are viewed as being essentially the same as any other organization. On the other hand, individuals taking the second perspective tend to believe that effective administration of a university organization requires an understanding of, and an affinity with, its institutional uniqueness. With respect to higher educational leadership theory, Schein (2010) famously claimed that leadership and organization are two sides of the same coin. In other words, the bureaucratic view of organizations is linked to a positivistic perspective on leadership, whereas the cultural view of organizations is linked to a cultural-symbolic perspective on leadership. Under a cultural-symbolic theory of leadership, "leaders may be required to act as anthropologists uncovering the organizational culture" (Bensimon et al., 2000, p. 221) rather than being required, for example, to act like commanders by taking charge, making decisions quickly, and imposing decisions via bureaucratic systems of punishment and reward. Accordingly, when adopting a cultural view of leadership, "the focus shifts from controlling behaviour to providing new frames of reference for interpreting experiences in the organization" (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 867).

Academic identity theory, unsurprisingly, is multi-faceted. According to Henkel (2005), "the construction of identity (individual and collective)…[is] a continuous and reflexive process, a synthesis of (internal) self definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others" (p. 157). It is, therefore, a hermeneutical process of interaction between the self and members of a defining community (Taylor, 1989). Early theoretical work on academic identity framed it in terms of two defining communities and one's particular mix of affinities to each: the discipline, and the local institution (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Clark, 1987, 1997; Hakala, 2009). Later work, however, found this two-part framework to be insufficient (Dill, 1982; Henkel, 2005; Valimaa, 1998) and a need was identified to "take into consideration…many cultural dimensions of academic communities" (Valimaa, 1998, p. 133) when describing academic identity and its formation. Henkel (2005), for example, wrote that "individual and collective values, [and a] sense of meaning and self-esteem in the academic profession…are [also] key constructs in a definition of [academic] identity" (p. 156). My description for academic identities, therefore, incorporates all three areas: the discipline (i.e., specialized research and teaching), the local university institution (i.e., service), and the academic profession (i.e., shared academic values and individual personal-professional values). It is acknowledged here that academic identity is not static. However, this article focuses on a high-level view and synthesis of academic identities. It is hoped that by doing so the resulting model will assist future researchers with an explication and description of the ongoing and dynamic processes associated with academic administrators' academic identity work.

Details of the Research Method

Five narratives were co-constructed and pseudonyms were used to help retain anonymity (Stovin, 2021). Purposive sampling was used to balance retired and active participants and age and gender. It also ensured experiences across multiple universities were incorporated. Participants were not previously personally known to the researcher but an arm's length professional or academic connection was present through the researcher's colleagues or through the research colleague who assisted with the purposive sampling. Participants held an associate deanship position in a Canadian university within the previous 15 years. Two participants were active associate deans (Deanna and Greg), two were recently retired but still active in academe (Jennifer and Gwen), and one had been retired for approximately 10 years (Scott). Participants held appointments across four different Canadian universities and had academic experience in other universities. All participants were from faculties of education. The research received formal approval from the appropriate university's research ethics board.

Three in-depth conversational interviews of approximately 60 to 90 minutes were conducted with each participant over a two-year period. In order to help ensure the research would result in complete stories, the first interview was for getting to know each participant and the remaining two interviews were for experiences the participant wanted to expand upon related to first becoming and then to being

an associate dean. Pre-interview activities (PIAs) were used for each interview, which was important for ensuring the research field was entered in the proper way (Ellis et al., 2011b, p. 12). All interviews were transcribed verbatim and participants had the opportunity to read and revise the transcripts as they wished between interviews. Participant checks were also carried out after the writing of each person's story. Despite receiving only minimal changes through participant checks, they were nonetheless a very valuable part of the process because participants confirmed that the stories were well put together, accurate, faithful to the conversations, and insightful.

The incorporation of PIAs was a rather unique and innovative part of the method—and is especially novel within higher educational administrative research. PIAs are helpful for increasing the likelihood of generating authentic and complete stories (Ellis et al., 2011a, 2013), often highlighting and reinforcing the meaningful patterns within and across the narrative accounts. They are also helpful for novice researchers and those who are inexperienced with conversational interviews, during which the interviewer

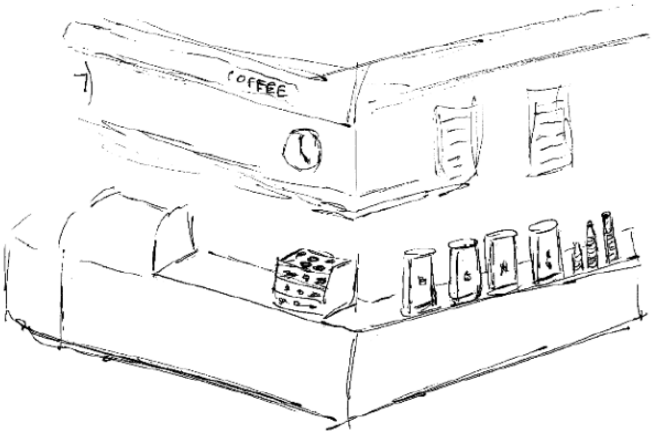
> needs to establish rapport with the participant…must begin in a way that communicates interest in what the participant has to say and encourages him or her to speak expansively…[and] must succeed in diffusing power differences, supporting negotiation of social roles, and creating a "new kind of interpersonal context," one that "violates many of the norms of everyday conversation" (Brenner, 2006, pp. 357–366, as cited in Ellis et al., 2013, p. 489)

PIAs request, for example, that a participant draw a picture, make a timeline, or create another representation of an experience or a time period that will be discussed. Figure 1 provides an example of a PIA artifact.

In addition to Ellis's body of work, the research method drew upon Polkinghorne (1995) who clarified that there are two types of narrative research methods: narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. A narrative analysis is the co-creation of a narrative account, whereas an analysis of narratives entails looking across various narrative accounts for themes and meanings that might provide further insight or inform theory and practice. The identification of themes and commonalities and differences among the participants and their stories was done using an iterative hermeneutical process following the concept of the never-ending hermeneutical circle that is fundamental to interpretivist work. In other words, a process of back and forth and inward and outward reading of the stories was conducted to ensure the meanings that were found within each of the stories corresponded with the themes that were identified from a higher-level reading. The hermeneutical task was also set aside at times and then returned to with fresh eyes and ears. That process is continued in this article by applying relevant theoretical lenses across the findings from the narrative analyses and

Figure 1

A PIA Exemplar—Greg on Fostering Relationships



the themes from the analysis of narratives to make meaning through the creation of a model to assist with improving our understanding of academic identity.

Findings

Each of the five co-constructed narrative accounts in Stovin (2021) was a rich and complete story that ranged from 14 to 20 pages long. When looking carefully across these stories, three key themes were found that revolved around community, relationships, and personal-professional commitments. Within the community and relationships themes, participants had in common a cultural approach to organizations and leadership respectively. Findings within the personal-professional commitments theme were, however, more complex. Here participants held in common some foundational beliefs related to the university institution, such as academic freedom and academic governance, but differed in their personal-professional values.

Participants' Experiences Related to Community and their Organizational Views

The first theme found was related to community and was expressed as participants attending to local organizational and broader cultural environments. This theme is best associated with the third research interest noted above because the ways in which participants attended to, or stewarded, their communities indicated that they primarily employed the cultural view of organizations, rather than the bureaucratic view. A description of how participants attended to their administrative and academic defining communities is below.

Greg, Deanna, and Gwen all spoke about the need to improve the administrative culture upon taking on their associate dean's role. In all cases this involved earning the trust of office staff and faculty. Greg modelled how he wanted people to engage in this environment, which was about being open, friendly, supportive, and helpful. Greg believes that cultural environments can spiral in either a negative or positive way, so he worked toward creating a positive momentum. Deanna had a "fantastic" group of people that would "go to the ends of the earth" for each other and were united behind a common cause. They often bonded over shared food—a tradition that Deanna began and others took up readily, which symbolized a "second home." Gwen noted the importance of ensuring that "people are treated well"—that they are respected, genuinely listened to, and empowered. Upon assuming the associate deanship, she had to make some difficult personnel decisions, but they "worked through" those and a cohesive team was formed.

The academic environment was another culture that participants consciously tended to as associate deans. Scott referred to this as "removing barriers" so that others could more readily pursue and achieve their goals. Scott was able to begin a cultural change that led to an improved environment for Indigenous students and faculty. For Greg it was important to be seen in both academic and administrative realms as "a faculty associate dean first." He was also intentional about being physically present and available to stay in tune with "the faculty's buzz." Gwen led important and courageous initiatives related to the social and academic environment of her faculty that provided support for marginalized and at-risk students and facilitated research support for professors. Jennifer intentionally focused on ensuring all faculty voices would be heard and equally valued—rather than only the loudest or most powerful ones that often tend to suppress the less privileged ones.

Participants' Experiences Related to Relationships and their Leadership Approaches

The relationships theme, expressed as fostering relationships with others, is associated with the second research interest and reflects that these specific individuals all primarily employed a cultural view of leadership. A description of how participants benefited from and contributed to the fostering of relationships is below.

All five participants benefited from positive interventions of others at various points in their career-life experiences and, in turn, made concerted efforts as leaders to develop positive relationships with others. Gwen, for example, while acknowledging that sometimes others can disappoint you, maintained a constant focus on the positives and possibilities that others offered. She celebrated their successes in public and worked with them on any negative issues in private. Gwen benefited from an excellent relationship with her Dean as she took on progressively more responsible academic administrative roles and was supported in developing strong relationships with individuals external to her university. Earlier, while Gwen was growing as a student, she benefited from strong academic role models and mentors who encouraged her to further pursue her research

interests and academia more generally. Similarly, Scott and Jennifer spoke a great deal about developing strong relationships with committee members for their heavy program renewal efforts and about support they had received from colleagues earlier in their careers.

Mentors intervened at various stages of all five participants' student careers, which encouraged and supported their aspirations and helped develop their professional networks. These interventions, of course, happened in different ways. For example, whereas Greg experienced an enlightenment moment in one of his last master's degree classes, Deanna was at a crossroads, considering a return to professional life, when she was offered a chance to teach students in a graduate level class and she "never looked back." For Jennifer, the kind words in a lunch line from a senior scholar turned into a lifelong deep personal and professional friendship. Scott emphasized the contribution one of his doctoral committee members made to his dissertation research, which he didn't appreciate at the time but had a significant influence on his subsequent career. Importantly, all five participants had significant transformative moments within their graduate student experiences that shaped who they were as individuals and as academics going forward. Oussoren (1992) calls this type of obvious, sudden, and substantial identity change a "shift in perceptual threshold" (p. 2). This finding is supportive of the research on academic identity work during doctoral studies noted previously.

As a result of these meaningful and beneficial early experiences with significant others, participants were intentional in fostering supportive individual relationships with others. For example, when Jennifer was referring to positive experiences of being mentored and of teaching graduate-level seminar classes, she said: "It was this convergence of scholarship and friendship and location that has been really important in my life, and in my thinking about my life." Consequently, as a professor and as an academic administrator, Jennifer intentionally designed physical and non-physical spaces in ways that would facilitate these convergences and relationships. Scott, when speaking generally about his time as an associate dean, said: "The experience I had…was one of working with these interested people to help them achieve what they wanted to achieve… it was going along with them…[often by asking] 'well, why can't we do that?'" Similarly, Greg said:

> If you foster relations. If you get out into the hallways, you go for lunch, coffee, you chat to colleagues, you're more inclined to hear about what they're up against and you're more…able to sometimes simply offer a reminder that I'm not actually surveilling you in that way…maybe we're getting some of that from the very top, but that doesn't mean that we have to do it that way.

The PIA in Figure 1 reinforced the importance of fostering relationships and helped to highlight the multiple meanings contained within the sentiment Greg articulated in this part of his story.

Participants' Ideological Commitments and Academic Identities

The third theme found was related to personal-professional commitments and was expressed as participants' commitments to ideals and ideas. This theme is best associated with the first research interest because participants' commitments to ideals and ideas provide insight into their academic identities (i.e., insight into who they are). Further, the narrative analyses made it clear that participants' academic identities were well-established long prior to assuming the associate deanship and, contrary to the typical experiences described in the higher educational leadership literature, they did not change subsequently in an obvious, sudden, and substantial way. A description is provided below.

Jennifer was, as Associate Dean, driven by a desire to make the soon-to-be renewed program the best in the country and on the cutting edge of innovation for her students. This can be understood as a manifestation of her academic identity that tends toward teaching. This academic leaning was expressed emphatically by Jennifer, "that her life began again" when she was able to take up her teaching role after her administrative appointment. This is not to say that she did not draw upon other aspects of her academic identity in her approach to the associate deanship. For example, deliberating on new ideas with other scholars (both students and faculty) and learning from each other in an egalitarian way was what Jennifer enjoyed most about academia. Jennifer drew upon this collegial aspect of her academic identity as an associate dean in her approach to deliberation on program renewal—where she tried to create a space where softer, yet thoughtful, voices could be heard and equally valued. Academic governance, freedom in teaching and research, and egalitarianism were crucial ideals and ideas to which Jennifer was heavily committed and which she drew upon in her approach to the associate deanship.

Throughout Scott's professional teaching career, he was repeatedly driven back to university studies by a need

"to know more." This carried on in his professorial role, where he developed expertise in multiple academic areas, edited a number of textbook series, and for many years was an editor of a top scholarly journal. Scott's leanings tended toward research but he strongly identified with teaching as well, which he emphasized on more than one occasion when he said that he never stopped being a teacher. Scott was an associate dean at a time when his colleagues, many of whom were professionals and primarily vested in field or extension work, had to make a shift in their academic practice to prioritizing research. With respect to the large program renewal effort he led, despite significant budget cuts, one outcome was a reduction of one course to faculty members' teaching loads to facilitate this change in research expectations. Scott, as a teacher, a professor, and an academic administrator, was collaborative and collegial—always genuinely seeking out others' contributions and thoughts and trying to remove barriers that others were experiencing. It is clear that research is linked tightly to teaching for Scott and that he drew heavily upon this aspect of his academic identity in his approach to academic administration. Academic governance, freedom in teaching and research, and open education were ideals and ideas central to Scott's academic identity.

For Deanna, the associate deanship was a call to service. She was fully committed and engaged with teaching and research activities as a professor but was also interested in institution building through serving her university community as an academic administrator whenever needed. This interest and obligation came from her commitment to what she called "reciprocity." Central to her "giving back" to her university community was the idea of "making things better"—that whoever might follow her could tweak things as necessary but would not have to build everything anew. Deanna believed strongly in collegial, open, and transparent debate and worked diligently to develop strong and respectful relationships with others in the context of academic governance of academic programming. Deanna's unique manifestation of her academic identity was, therefore, based on the ideals and ideas of collegiality in academic governance, freedom in teaching and research, and reciprocity.

Greg's academic identity tended to be manifested toward an emancipatory perspective of higher education (see Angus, 2009). The enlightenment experience he had in one of his master's degree classes "changed his whole life," which was an experience he wanted others to have as well. This heavily influenced his approach to academic administration—but also his teaching and research. Greg wanted to facilitate an open, respectful, and safe academic environment—in particular with respect to freedom in teaching—so that students might be more likely to share in a similar educational experience. As an associate dean he wanted to be perceived in both administrative and academic realms as a faculty associate dean first. That is, as an ally of his faculty colleagues and a supporter of their interests and needs, which he worked diligently to achieve through the development of relationships in both realms. Emancipatory purposes of higher education, academic governance, and freedom in teaching and research are key ideals and ideas underpinning Greg's academic identity.

Gwen's story conveyed a deep humanistic belief system. Gwen and her Dean worked hard to ensure that people were "treated well," and she consistently used a lens for seeing the "positives and possibilities" in situations and in others. While she made many significant contributions to her faculty and other communities, one particularly impactful contribution was the courageous establishment of a centre (and an environment) in the service of at-risk and often marginalized individuals. In other words, Gwen was committed to social justice initiatives and goals and achieved her aspirations in ways supported by her faculty colleagues through the principles of academic governance. University teaching and research served as vectors that brought Gwen into academic administration, through which she was able to make a meaningful difference in the lives of students, faculty, and people in the broader community. Gwen drew upon ideas and ideals related to humanism, social justice, and academic governance when manifesting her academic identity in her role as an associate dean.

Discussion

The type of interpretive and narrative research method used for this project is exploratory or observational in nature. It requires that the researcher be a good "front-seat passenger" who is genuinely interested in where the "participant driver" wants to go and is willing to help navigate a bit along the way. As such, it does not guarantee specific answers to a priori questions and does not offer generalizability of findings. Its strength, however, is that narratives can be evocative in researchers and readers alike of thoughts, feelings, connections, and memories that can lead to related insights and understandings with potential for transferability. For me, one such outcome is the model illustrated in Figure 2 that can be useful for future research investigating the appli-

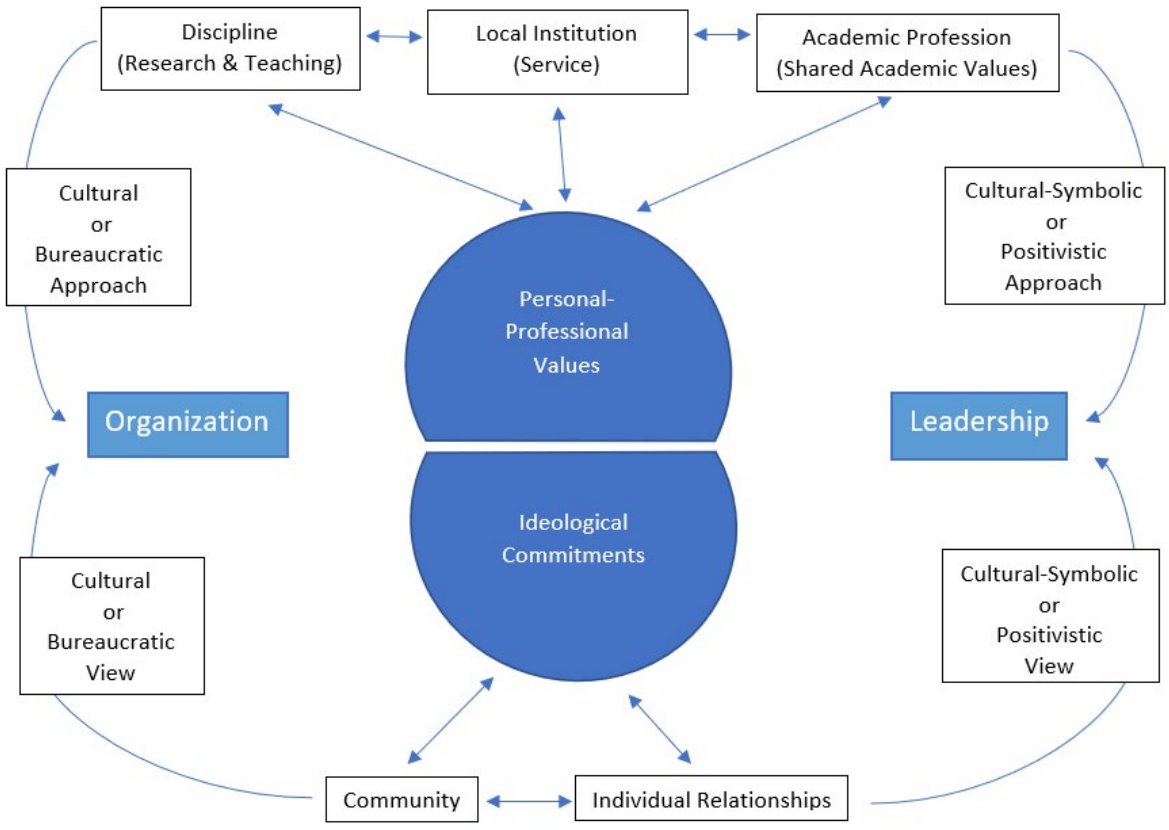
cation and development of academic identity among academic administrators. I believe it will prove useful in at least two ways. It can be used, as it was here, to take a high-level view or synthesis of individual academic administrators' academic identities in order to gain a deeper understanding of their approaches to their roles. Alternatively, it can be used in a more detailed way that places it against a backdrop of a specific situation and then stacks the model upon itself as an individual experiences passing through other specific situations. This stacked and dynamic approach could capture more nuanced changes and refinements in participants' academic identities, as well as the circumstances and factors around academic identity resiliency, thereby building further on the definition of identity offered by Henkel (2005) and Taylor (1989).

At the base of the model is community, individual relationships, and ideological commitments, which represent the three themes found from an analysis of the co-constructed narratives. Learning about participants' past and current defining communities, significant relationships, and ideological commitments helps to understand how participants view their surrounding organization and leadership role and how they developed these views. All participants in this research preferred a cultural view of organizations and leadership—but future research, especially with participants at other levels of academic administration or in other disciplinary or institutional locations, may reveal preferences for other views on organization and leadership.

Learning about participants' past and current defining communities, significant relationships, and ideological commitments also helps to understand participants' academic identities, which are at the top of the illustrated model and comprised of affinities for the: (1) discipline (i.e., research and teaching areas), (2) local institution (i.e., ser-

Figure 2

A Model for Understanding the Application and Development of Associate Deans' Academic Identity



vice), and (3) academic profession (i.e., shared academic values and personal-professional values). Gaining an understanding of participants' academic identities is important because, for example, academic identities were key factors that determined participants' reasons for assuming the associate deanship. Although all participants were strongly committed to both the discipline and the institution, there were slight differences in their motivations for taking on the associate deanship, which aligned with their differing affinities toward one or another of research, teaching, and service. For example, Scott's affinity with research and Greg's affinity with teaching were big parts of why they were "invited in" to their academic administrative roles.

Differences in academic identities were also factors that help explain participants' approaches to their associate dean roles. That is, although all participants were heavily committed to the shared academic values of academic freedom and academic governance, differences existed in their individual academic values associated with their personal-professional values. The importance of these slight differences was captured prophetically by Deanna and included in the title of this paper: "How could I possibly do my professional work if I wasn't acknowledging all of this… that *made me who I am* [emphasis added]." This part of academic identity is, therefore, placed at the centre of the model with personal-professional values and ideological commitments being mirror images of one another. The individual academic values that participants drew heavily upon in their work as associate deans were detailed in the findings above as egalitarianism, open education, reciprocity, emancipatory education, and social justice through humanism. Their commitments to these ideals and values gave meaning to their work as associate deans, whereas the related ideas informed their decision making and approaches to their work. That is, the personal-professional values held by participants in this research go hand in hand with a cultural approach to organization and leadership.

Limitations of the Research and Areas for Future Exploration

Interpretivist and narrative research is, obviously, not statistically generalizable. Instead, opportunities for insight and transferability are offered by the rich details and evocative moments contained within and across the stories produced. Multiple understandings from the insight gained are captured by the model in Figure 2. However, the finding that all participants preferred and primarily employed a cultural approach to academic administration is a possible outcome of a non-randomized sample limited to faculties of education and to the role of associate dean. Additional similar research should, therefore, extend to associate deans in other university faculties and to academic administrators in other roles. It may be, for example, that associate deans in business, science, or engineering are more likely to prefer and employ a more positivistic approach to academic administration.

Another example of a limitation of the non-generalizability of the research is the finding that the participants in this research did not experience an obvious, sudden, and significant shift in their academic identities while in their associate dean roles. This finding does not, of course, mean that such a change does not or cannot happen. It does, however, bring into question the ubiquity of this type of academic identity change typically described and assumed by higher educational leadership scholars. It also highlights the possibility that these changes in perceptual threshold are more likely to occur at a different place in the career path, such as at the level of chair, dean, or president, or for individuals who may not have experienced such a shift during graduate studies. Longitudinal research that follows individuals throughout their whole academic careers would, therefore, be very welcome to better understand when responses to pressures on academic identities are a change in perceptual threshold, an intentional resistance to change, or more nuanced and subtle refinements.

Finally, the finding that the participants in this research, as seasoned faculty, drew upon their well-established academic identities while in their associate dean roles and made consistent intentional efforts to maintain those identities suggests that they were well-prepared for the most significant aspects of their new roles. Nonetheless, future research exploring the professional growth opportunities that new academic administrators believe would support both their academic identity work and their structural-functional skill development would be worthwhile. Fundamentally, however, it is clear that a real need exists for future research to take a more detailed look at how academic identities are developed, maintained, and applied with a focus on individuals' experiences across various specific situations in the hopes of better understanding the dynamics and nuances of academic identity change over time. The model proposed here will be a helpful place to start.

Conclusion

Gill (2009) asked:

> For all the interest in reflexivity in recent decades, the experiences of academics have somehow escaped critical attention.... What would it mean to turn our lens upon our own labour processes, organisational governance and conditions of production? What would we find if, instead of studying others, we focused our gaze upon our own community? (p. 2)

Stovin (2021) used an interpretive and narrative research approach to explore the experiences of five associate deans. Looking across their narrative accounts, three themes were found that related to stewarding communities, fostering relationships, and commitments to ideals and ideas. Applying higher educational organization, leadership, and academic identity theories as interpretive lenses, this article proposes a model that will be helpful for better understanding the experiences of academic administrators and how their academic identities are developed, applied, and maintained.

In addition to the themes found and the model developed, looking across the narrative accounts revealed that common among participants' academic identities was a strong commitment to research, teaching, service, academic governance, and academic freedom—yet slight differences in their affinities for each helped explain their various motivations for assuming the associate deanship. Further, the different individual personal-professional values to which participants were committed, such as reciprocity, egalitarianism, and social justice, helped explain their approaches to their academic administrative roles.

Another finding of interest was that participants in this research did not experience academic identity crises subsequent to taking on the associate deanship—at least not as the obvious, sudden, and substantial change typically described and assumed in the higher educational leadership literature. These seasoned faculty members had already experienced these types of changes in perceptual threshold during their graduate school studies, which is a finding that is supportive of recent research on academic identity work. Instead, participants manifested and applied their well-established academic identity by making consistent intentional efforts to maintain it, despite the inherent pressures in new administrative situations, and by drawing upon its various aspects in their approaches to their new roles. This, too, is in keeping with recent nascent research on academic identity work, but adds to this body of research by highlighting the importance of considering how academic identity is not only maintained but also applied.

Interpretive and narrative research approaches, the experiences of academic administrators other than deans, chairs, and presidents, and academic identity work beyond graduate students and beginning professors are all areas that are underrepresented within higher educational administration literature. This article provides a beginning step within these underexplored research areas and a model that can be useful for future qualitative or quantitative research in order to continue to respond to the challenge offered by Gill (2009).

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