

ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
DOES THE PRESIDENTIAL CAREER PATHWAY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Phillip Daniel Byrne

Dr. Barbara N. Martin, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

In the United States of America, the role and responsibilities for the University president in many institutions have undergone significant change for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As noted by Duderstadt (2006) “[t]he American presidency has more of the character of a chief executive officer” (p. 249). Amey (2006) stated “[l]eaders are key to how organizations function, and there is little doubt that the leaders who are needed to guide postsecondary institutions in tomorrow’s complex environments have to think about their work differently than did their predecessors” (p. 58). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain understanding of two university presidents (one selected through the [traditional] academy career path and the other from the corporate business sector [nontraditional]) through an entrepreneurship lens. The researcher selected a dual case study to focus on discovery rather than hypothesis testing (Merriam, 1998). Data within the study were gathered from interviews, focus groups, and document review providing multiple perspectives by the study participants. The two campus presidents (n=2) were interviewed, along with an additional 19 individuals from the executive or cabinet leadership team.

Through analysis, it was determined that three main themes and six sub themes emerged: 1) Sense of Urgency, with subthemes of: a) Leadership, b) Communication; 2) Culture of Higher Education, with subthemes of: a) History and Traditions, b) Environment; and 3) *Entrepreneurial Vision*, with subthemes of: a) 21<sup>st</sup> Century Higher Education, b) Institutional Platform and Innovation. Findings from the study indicate the sense of urgency for leadership transcends the higher education institution for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the career pathways for these

Presidents did not reflect a difference in how these leaders approached the challenges of a rapidly changing environment. Yet, the president who worked his way up to the presidency through the traditional pathway of the academy appeared to be more hesitant to change the traditions of the academy. Conversely, the president who came up the ranks of business, viewed change as what was needed in the university and if that change did not occur, survival was an issue.