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Exploring Kouzes and Posner's Exemplary Leadership Practices of Presidential Assistants in Higher Education

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Exploring Kouzes and Posner's Exemplary Leadership Practices of Presidential Assistants in Higher Education

Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the frequency in which presidential assistants in higher education institutions engaged in Kouzes and Posner's five practices of exemplary leadership and in the managerial functions performed daily to meet the needs of the strategic goals and objectives of their institutions. There is limited research on the position of presidential assistants, which has existed for more than 40 years, and it is important to learn about this critical role and its impact at colleges and universities. Due to the complex challenges facing higher education institutions, presidents of colleges and universities need to rely more than ever on the talents of presidential assistants to assist them in implementing institutional strategic goals and objectives, and to help them manage daily operations. The participants for this study consisted of presidential assistants who reported directly to public college and university presidents within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. In this study, an online survey instrument, including Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) Self-Assessment was utilized. The results of this study revealed that the managerial functions of presidential assistants varied based on demographic and professional characteristics. A vast amount of their time is expended daily on solving problems and collaborating with others to meet rapidly changing demands. The LPI assessment revealed that presidential assistants effectively use leadership practices daily when interacting with internal constituents. As a result of this study, recommendations for practice are provided including professional development to enhance the leadership skills of presidential assistants.

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Exploring Kouzes and Posner's Exemplary Leadership Practices of
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By

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of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
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2018

Dedication

This work is dedicated in the memory of my loving mother, Cletius W. Whitfield, who passed away on June 21, 2018. My mother taught me to be courageous, inspired me to complete whatever I started, and reminded me that all things are possible through God.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank my staunch supporters: my awesome sister, Sharon D. Whitfield; my aunts, Joyce Forrester and Shirley Whitfield; and my uncle, E. Daniel Witherspoon, who expressed compassion and words of encouragement throughout my doctoral journey. My partner, Jonathan “Joe” Cobb, who continuously reminded me that if achieving a doctorate degree was easy, everyone would have one, and for always encouraging me to just do my best. To a special young lady in my life, my niece, Aliyah J. McReed, may you be inspired to be courageous, to finish what you start, and to put your trust in God!

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friendship and your commitment to embracing the doctoral process. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors!

Biographical Sketch

Ms. Sheila M. Strong is the Executive Assistant to the President at Monroe Community College. She attended The College at Brockport, State University of New York, and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Business Communication in 2001, a Master's degree in Public Administration in 2004, and a Certificate in Non-Profit Management in 2009. In the summer of 2015, she began doctoral studies at St. John Fisher College in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Strong pursued her research in Exploring Kouzes and Posner's Exemplary Leadership Practices of Presidential Assistants in Higher Education under the direction of Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason and Dr. Ruth Harris and received the Ed.D. degree in 2018.

Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the frequency in which presidential assistants in higher education institutions engaged in Kouzes and Posner's five practices of exemplary leadership and in the managerial functions performed daily to meet the needs of the strategic goals and objectives of their institutions. There is limited research on the position of presidential assistants, which has existed for more than 40 years, and it is important to learn about this critical role and its impact at colleges and universities. Due to the complex challenges facing higher education institutions, presidents of colleges and universities need to rely more than ever on the talents of presidential assistants to assist them in implementing institutional strategic goals and objectives, and to help them manage daily operations.

The participants for this study consisted of presidential assistants who reported directly to public college and university presidents within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. In this study, an online survey instrument, including Kouzes and Posner's Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) Self-Assessment was utilized. The results of this study revealed that the managerial functions of presidential assistants varied based on demographic and professional characteristics. A vast amount of their time is expended daily on solving problems and collaborating with others to meet rapidly changing demands. The LPI assessment revealed that presidential assistants effectively use leadership practices daily when interacting with internal constituents. As a result of this study, recommendations for practice are provided

including professional development to enhance the leadership skills of presidential assistants.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In higher education institutions, leaders and leadership are crucial to institutional effectiveness, and they are essential during times of organizational change (Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017). Senior leaders in colleges and universities, such as presidents, provosts, and vice presidents, currently face various challenges and complexities that are changing the landscape of higher education. These challenges include the *rapid growth in new technologies for pedagogy* (many higher education institutions are providing online academic programs), *shifts in student demographics* (because traditional students are no longer high school students but adults who may need to come back to school to obtain better job opportunities in the workforce), *increases in demand for accountability* (colleges and universities have to demonstrate that they are graduating students from their institutions), *decreasing financial resources* (federal and state funds continue to shrink); and *declines in student enrollment* (as unemployment decreases, less students attend colleges and universities and the recruitment for students becomes more competitive) (Basham, 2012; Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017; Price, Schneider, & Quick, 2016). To effectively address these challenges, leaders who can change the culture of an organization and effectuate the changes that are required to respond to the new challenges facing higher education. Senior leaders in higher education institutions may not be able to address new challenges without the expertise of talented and knowledgeable staff, such as middle managers (Jones & Rudd, 2008).

At the time of this writing, middle managers in colleges and universities are utilized to implement the goals and objectives of strategic plans by working with various constituents on college and university campuses (Morris & Laipple, 2015). Similar to middle managers, some presidential assistants execute strategic goals and objectives when managing the daily operations in the offices of college and university presidents (Curchack, 2009). Presidential assistants have played a major role on college and university campuses for more than 40 years, carrying out managerial functions such as planning, organizing, staffing, leading, evaluating, and developing in the presidents' offices (Curchack, 2009). Based on the differing presidents' needs, the functions of presidential assistants may differ between 2-year and 4-year institutions. Some presidential assistants are members of the president's cabinet and serve in other capacities, functioning as the secretary to the governing boards (Curchack, 2009; Montell, 2000). As higher education continues to face increasingly difficult challenges, the roles and responsibilities of presidential assistants could increase to help presidents and organizations meet those demands. While a presidential assistant is one of the most crucial positions in a college and to the university president, research on this role is absent from the leadership literature for higher education (Fisher, 1984; Stringer, 1977). In times of organizational change, effective leadership at all levels should be fostered for the betterment of academic institutions, students, faculty, and staff (Basham, 2012).

Leadership in Higher Education

For many years, scholars in different disciplines, such as historians, social scientists, and philosophers, have studied leadership. The concept of leadership has been defined in different ways, and it has been often misunderstood (Hackman & Johnson,

2013). Northouse (2013) defined leadership as an interaction between leaders and followers to achieve shared goals. In higher education, there are different levels of authority with some employees responsible to direct, lead, and oversee divisions and departments, while others execute and implement those directives within divisions and departments. Hackman and Johnson (2013) defined leadership as having social influence and the ability to leave a mark on organizations. For example, senior leaders at higher education institutions may claim that they exceeded a major capital campaign or increased the number of academic buildings during their tenure at an institution. Kouzes and Posner (2012) defined leadership as “the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (p. 4). In higher education, when major challenges impact an institution, it requires the campus community, at all levels, such as faculty, staff, and students, to work together to make changes for the betterment of the institution. This study utilized Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) definition because research has demonstrated that anyone has the capacity to learn and become a leader, and leadership is not necessarily contingent upon one’s leadership title (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Posner, 2016). This premise was applied and examined to determine the extent to which presidential assistants engaged in Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership in their managerial functions, which they used to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

The administrative roles of leadership and management are described in two different ways as it relates to influencing staff. According to Hofmeyer, Sheingold, Klopper, and Warland (2015), both are essential to lead organizations through

challenging times. For instance, individuals who serve as managers are task oriented and ensure the institutional goals of organizations are met. In contrast, individuals who serve as leaders are visionaries, understand current trends impacting an institution, and can lead the organization through change (Hofmeyer et al., 2015; Waters & Hightower, 2016).

Although the roles of leadership and management differ, both leaders and managers must be able to build relationships and influence others to accomplish tasks (McMaster, 2014).

Research has demonstrated that leadership in the field of higher education must be the responsibility of all academic and administrative positions to effectively impact organizational change (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey, & Rynald, 2012). In colleges and universities, presidents are charged with being visionaries, and they are responsible for making final decisions about initiatives for institutions; however, to garner support from faculty, staff, and students, college presidents often rely on recommendations from various shared governance representatives and stakeholders within the institution before choosing to pursue a new initiative that may have broad implications (Hofmeyer et al., 2015).

Administrative Leadership in Higher Education

In higher education institutions, there are different types of senior leaders who are members of both the academic and nonacademic staff. These leaders include chancellors, presidents, provosts, and vice presidents who are responsible for advancing higher education institutions by visualizing strategic goals and objectives (Davis & Jones, 2014; Fisher, 1984; State University of New York [SUNY], 2016). Of these senior leaders, vice presidents and provosts are members of the president's cabinet, serve at the pleasure of

the president, and lead divisions such as finance, student affairs, academic affairs, and workforce development (Fisher, 1984).

In colleges and universities, administrative middle managers typically include “directors and coordinators of admissions, institutional research, registrars, computing and technology, human resources, alumni affairs, student affairs, placement and counseling services, financial aid, development and planned giving” (Rosser, 2004, p. 317). The roles and functions of middle managers often include the expectation to implement the daily strategic goals and objectives and to work with internal and external constituents on college matters. Middle management positions are considered essential positions in higher education within the United States (Rosser, 2004).

Another position that has similar functions as administrative middle managers are presidential assistants who report directly to the chief executive officers in higher education institutions (Curchack, 2009). Based on an extensive literature review, at the time of this study, the presidential assistant position seems to be overlooked by leadership scholars. Given the increased challenges facing higher education institutions, senior leaders may need increased support from middle managers, including presidential assistants, to successfully address increased and complex challenges (Davis & Jones, 2014; Odhiambo, 2014). This study examined the extent to which presidential assistants engaged in Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership and the managerial functions they used to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives in a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

Middle managers. In higher education, middle managers report to senior leaders, supervise direct reports and colleagues, collaborate with others to solve situations, coach

peers and direct reports to complete tasks, and/or solve minor to complex problems to meet the daily demands of organizations (Branson, Franken, & Penney, 2016; McMaster, 2014). “Middle management positions include academic and administrative department heads, coordinators, advisors, and award-level coordinators” (Branson et al., 2016, p. 129). These managers often play an important role in organizational change, and they bridge the gap between the expectations of senior academic leaders and front-line staff to ensure that institutional goals and objectives are met daily (Rushumbu, 2014). Middle managers in higher education institutions may lead academic departments or student support services and participate in decision making that could impact organizational change and influence faculty, students, and staff (Waters & Hightower, 2016). According to Morris and Laipple (2015), middle managers appointed to higher education leadership roles are expected to execute increasingly strategic goals and objectives in educational environments.

Another important function of middle managers is to manage up, down, and across institutional structures to meet the daily demands facing colleges and universities (Branson et al., 2016). These managers are responsible for managing, influencing, and navigating the administrative workflow of communication between the academic staff and senior leaders to ensure that the respective missions of the colleges and universities are understood and implemented (Branson et al., 2016). Middle managers are critical in the field of higher education, because these individuals can lead and manage an increasing number of initiatives and multifaceted tasks. According to Vilkinas (2014), middle managers in the field of higher education play a critical role; therefore, it is

important to learn about their level of leadership to gain knowledge about the value they bring to an institution on a daily basis.

Considering the increasing challenges facing higher education institutions, the ability to manage working relationships between senior leaders, subordinates, and colleagues could become difficult. Therefore, middle managers need to explore leadership practices that could enhance their ability to navigate between organizational structures, and to develop relationships that encourage and inspire others to achieve new expectations in higher education institutions (Branson et al., 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Northouse, 2013). Prior to this study, the role of presidential assistants in higher education institutions was rarely examined in leadership literature (Stringer, 1977).

Curchack (2009) suggested that presidential assistants play an important role at colleges and universities, and the job functions of this position are similar to those of other middle management positions in the field of higher education. Presidential assistants can play a significant role in implementing the daily strategic goals and objectives of a college or university. While the managerial functions of presidential assistants are similar to other middle managers, this position seems to have been overlooked by leadership scholars, creating a gap in the existing leadership literature.

Problem Statement

The position of presidential assistant has existed for more than 40 years; however, little empirical research has examined the managerial functions of this position (Stringer, 1977) and the research has not examined to what extent presidential assistants perform as leaders in higher education institutions at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. Substantial changes, such as increased growth in technology,

changes in the global economy and demographics, decreased fiscal resources, and increased expectations of institutional accountability, are impacting higher education institutions in the United States (Basham, 2012). Because of these many challenges, it is vital to have a better understanding of the current leadership practices of presidential assistants and how they can be relied upon to meet the strategic goals and initiatives of colleges and universities. Given the proximity of presidential assistants to college and university presidents, presidential assistants have a particular leadership vantage point that allows them to view leadership challenges through a lens that differs from other academic or administrative middle managers in higher education institutions.

Basham (2012) posited that senior leaders in colleges and universities need to empower faculty, staff, and administrators in all areas of the institution to successfully address these increasingly complex challenges. Middle manager positions, such as presidential assistants, serve as a valuable resource to assist institutions in meeting the increased demands and complex challenges in the field of higher education. The roles and responsibilities of middle managers are to influence, empower, and assist in the implementation of the mission and goals of the institution through the engagement of staff and colleagues (Branson et al., 2016). Daily, middle managers are challenged to manage up, down, and across diverse populations, and research suggests that learning more about the leadership practices of these leaders may support higher education institutions to meet the strategic objectives of their organizations (Branson et al., 2016; McMaster, 2014; Vilkinas, 2014).

Functions of presidential assistants in higher education. The functions of presidential assistants include, but they are not limited to, leading, organizing, planning,

and staffing the offices of presidents at colleges and universities (Curchack, 2009). The position of presidential assistants in higher education may have evolved into a position that plays a significant role in meeting the strategic goals and initiatives of colleges and universities. The responsibilities performed by some presidential assistants have changed from roles, such as secretarial and clerical staff, to roles of middle managers, who are tasked with fulfilling increasingly higher expectations (Curchack, 2009). The functions and job titles of assistants are different compared to 40 years ago. According to Stringer (1977), personal assistants in the field of higher education have been known as colleagues, administrative assistants, military staff, interns, specialists, and freelancers. The responsibilities of these assistants have ranged from scheduling and transcribing meeting notes to proofreading documents and providing secretarial support to academic managers (Stringer, 1977), while the title of colleague, which was considered a more senior leader role, made decisions on funding and long-term planning (Stringer, 1977). In this study, most of the presidential assistants reported solely to college or university presidents, led projects, and managed staff in the president's office (Curchack, 2009).

Although the presidential assistant position has a long-standing history in colleges and universities, there seems to be little empirical research regarding the contributions of such individuals serving in this role. Several dissertation studies have examined the career paths, roles, functions, and leadership styles of presidential assistants. Carlson (1991) wrote a dissertation about the professional roles and functions of presidential assistants. O'Reilly (2000) studied presidential assistants in specialized institutions in higher education. Sass (2016) and Stiles (2008) researched the association between the situational leadership styles of presidential assistants and their sources and use of power.

Miles (2000) studied the career paths of presidential assistants, and Gifford (2011) wrote about presidential assistants emerging from the shadows toward a work of typology in higher education. In totality, the above-mentioned researchers examined the roles and responsibilities of presidential assistants in higher education and found that they performed functions such as (a) managed the president's office, (b) attended campus meetings and events on behalf of the president, (c) developed meeting agenda for shared governance groups, (d) coordinated special projects, and (e) prepared correspondence and budgets for the president's office (Carlson, 1991; Gifford, 2011; Miles, 2000; O'Reilly, 2000).

Fisher (1985) described presidential assistants as the most-trusted staff members of college and university presidents, with job functions ranging from small to large assignments based on the presidents' discretion. The functions included "running errands, opening doors, driving to off-campus meetings, representing the president, and at times, acting as vice presidents without portfolio" (Fisher, 1985, p. 82). Some presidential assistants in the field of higher education may downplay their self-worth to avoid superiority over their senior leaders (Fisher, 1984).

As the roles and responsibilities of presidential assistants have evolved, presidential assistants have recommended that professional development is helpful to assist this growing position in the field of higher education (Curchack, 2009). In 1987, a small group of presidential assistants met at an American Council on Education meeting to discuss the development of a national association for presidential assistants (Curchack, 2009; National Association for Presidential Assistants in Higher Education [NAPAHE], 2016). In 1989, the first meeting of 45 presidential assistants was held in Washington,

D.C. Following this meeting, the original group of presidential assistants became the steering committee for the Presidential Assistants in Education. In 1992, the steering committee became a professional association called the NAPAHE (2016), and affiliated itself with the American Council on Education (Curchack, 2009). Over the years, this national organization has prospered and grown to more than 400 members. The mission of the association is to build a network for presidential assistants to learn new ideas and best practices from their peers and to provide presidential assistants with professional development seminars, conferences, workshops, and meetings (Curchack, 2009; NAPAHE, 2016).

Curchack (2009) published a book about the roles and responsibilities of presidential assistants in higher education that provided real-life experiences of the work of presidential assistants in higher education. Curchack (2009) conducted an examination of the experiences of college presidents and presidential assistants and revealed that presidential assistants' first careers were in the field of secretary, associate director, assistant director, or professional staff member. Curchack (2009) noted that presidential assistants functioned more like middle managers in many institutions of higher education. The research has identified six managerial functions of presidential assistants: (a) *planning* that involves prioritizing tasks, (b) *organizing* responsibilities, (c) *staffing* the president's office, (d) *leading* with the ability to influence others, (e) *evaluating* the performance of staff and providing constructive feedback, and (f) *developing* that involved teaching, coaching, and training (Curchack, 2009; Yukl, 2012).

To describe the various positions, roles, and responsibilities of presidential assistants, NAPAHE has defined titles and career trajectories (Table 1.1). It should be

noted, however, that the job responsibilities are not consistent and vary from one higher education institution to another (Curchack, 2009).

Table 1.1

Presidential Assistant Titles and Responsibilities

Proposed Title Progression	Typical Range of Responsibilities
Administrative Assistant to the President	Executive secretary responsibilities including clerical support, scheduling, travel arrangements, and office management.
Assistant to the President	Primary professional support for presidents, may include producing agendas, policy research, writing, and managing office staff.
Special Assistant to the President	May be differentiated from “Assistant to” by a specialized portfolio, such as diversity, legislative, public information, special events, and speechwriting.
Executive Assistant to the President	Senior policy-level assistant or advisor; may have additional management responsibilities, including staff supervision, management of agendas and governance processes, representing the president at public functions, and membership in the president’s cabinet.
Executive Associate or Associate to the President	Prefix and title denote a higher level of administrative or policymaking/advising responsibility.
Chief of Staff	Advisor to the president, manager, and gatekeeper of the office of the president; coordinator of the divisions reporting to the president.

Note. Adapted from “Other Duties as Assigned: Presidential Assistants in Higher Education,” by M. P. Curchack, 2009, p. 103. Copyright 2009 by Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Based on a nonempirical review of presidential assistants’ job descriptions and postings in 2017 by the researcher, it appears the responsibilities and functions of presidential assistants have evolved from Stringer’s (1977) original definition, and they are more supportive of Curchack’s (2009) description. For example, presidential

assistants are frequently collaborating with others to solve institutional problems, serving as the presidents' liaisons between internal and external constituents, providing supervision of staff, serving on the president's executive team, working with staff to implement the strategic goals and objectives in the institutions, and managing the daily operations of the president's offices. The functions of presidential assistants seem to have significantly evolved to ones that are similar to the roles of academic and administrative middle managers in higher education.

Emerging Leadership Role of Presidential Assistants

To gain an understanding of the managerial functions of presidential assistants at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States, the author conducted an initial search to review the websites of several colleges and universities to find job descriptions for the title of *presidential assistant*. A review of the job descriptions from these the Northeastern United States revealed that presidential assistants demonstrate a range of leadership skills and are responsible for a mix of managerial roles and responsibilities. The titles used for the presidential assistant position, which were included in this review, ranged from *executive assistant* to *the president* to *chief of staff*. The expectations of presidential assistants varies between higher education institutions, and the position titles did not always specify the level of job responsibility (Curchack, 2009; SUNY, 2016). Based on the researcher's review of the job descriptions, presidential assistants in higher education are expected to manage strategic initiatives within their institutions, and many are responsible for leading and influencing others to meet the daily demands on campus, while developing relationships with internal and external constituents on behalf of the college and university presidents.

According to Curchack (2009), presidential assistants do and can serve as members of the president's senior leadership team or cabinet. As managers, presidential assistants oversee the presidents' offices, encourage staff to work together toward a common goal, take the lead in administering the presidents' expectations to implement programmatic activities, communicate on projects with the presidents' senior leadership teams, and encourage administrative support staff to give their best performance (Curchack, 2009). Presidential assistants provide constructive feedback, and serve as positive role models (Curchack, 2009).

The review of the most current job descriptions, at the time of this study, revealed common functions amongst presidential assistants. Table 1.2 shows a comparison of the managerial functions described by Curchack (2009) with this researcher's review of the job descriptions within the studied large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States (SUNY, 2016). In addition, Table 1.2 describes the functions of presidential assistants, how closely the functions align with middle manager position functions in higher education, and how the leadership practices of Kouzes and Posner (2012) might assist in examining the leadership behaviors of presidential assistants.

Table 1.2

Functions of Middle Managers and Presidential Assistants in Higher Education

Functions	Presidential Assistants in Higher Education (Curchack, 2009)	Review of 2016 SUNY Position Descriptions
<i>Developing</i> involved teaching, coaching, and training	Make sure staff in the president’s office is aware of office protocol that serves as a guide to complete tasks. Ensure staff receive professional development to advance their careers.	Develops complex analyses and reports for internal and external review such as budget requests and accreditation reports. Assists in the formulation and drafts policy and position statements. Prepares confidential internal management audits to assess programs and implement change.
<i>Evaluating</i> involved the performance of staff and providing constructive feedback	Create goals and objectives that correlate with the college’s mission and the president’s office, and measure job performance.	Coordinates personnel transactions, office systems, and the financial administration of the president’s office.
<i>Leading</i> with the ability to influence others	The ability to develop work relationships with internal and external constituents and influence others to meet the goals and objectives of the institution and the president’s office.	Serves as a member of the president’s cabinet or similar executive staff forums. Facilitates the daily operation of the president’s office and provides leadership to the functions of the office. Acts as a liaison to internal governance, policy-making bodies, and external community groups.
<i>Organizing</i> office responsibilities	Review correspondence that comes into the president’s office and delegate to the appropriate person to handle on behalf of the president.	Serves as senior policy advisor to relieve the chief administrative officer of various program aspects. Reviews correspondence to the president and drafts responses to complex issues, internal and external constituents, and other campus inquiries.

Functions	Presidential Assistants in Higher Education (Curchack, 2009)	Review of 2016 SUNY Position Descriptions
<i>Planning</i> involved prioritizing tasks	<p>Work with the president’s scheduler to coordinate routine events and meetings that involve the president, and ensure events are scheduled well in advance and communicated to the internal and external constituents involved.</p> <p>Work with the president to develop, select, and implement new initiatives to promote a positive image of the president’s office and advance the college’s mission.</p>	<p>Plans and coordinates major campus events, special projects, awards, conferences, receptions, and visits by major public figures.</p> <p>Prepares speeches and other presidential presentations to campus and community.</p> <p>Prepares confidential internal management audits to assess programs and implement change.</p>
<i>Staffing</i> involved hiring staff	Recruit and retain professional and knowledgeable staff to build a culture of competence within the president’s office. Make sure there are enough staff members to handle the workload of the president’s office.	Serves as a confidential assistant to the campus president, with major responsibility for overseeing the president’s office support staff.

Note. Adapted from “Other Duties as Assigned: Presidential Assistants in Higher Education,” by M. P. Curchack, 2009, p. 36-43. Copyright 2009 by Rowman & Littlefield Education, and from SUNY Position Descriptions (2016) found on the SUNY website.

A broad body of research exists on administrative senior leadership positions, such as presidents, provosts, and vice presidents, but limited research is available on middle managers such as presidential assistants (Branson et al., 2016; Vilkinas, 2014). Gaining a deeper understanding of the range of leadership practices of presidential assistants would add to the body of knowledge of higher education leadership research. In addition, knowing more about presidential assistant leadership behaviors could highlight how this position can contribute to successfully meeting the newly complex challenges facing higher education.

Theoretical Rationale

Leadership scholars, such as James V. Downton, James MacGregor Burns, Bernard M. Bass, Jim Kouzes, and Barry Posner, have studied transformational leadership for more than 40 years (Ghasabeh, Soosay, & Reaiche, 2015; Northouse, 2016). The original authors of transformational leadership include James V. Downton, James MacGregor, and Bernard M. Bass. Downton (1973) created the term *transformational leadership*. Burns (1978) expanded the definition of transformational leadership to include four concepts of transformational leadership: “idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation” (Ghasabeh et al., 2015, p. 462). Bass (1985) conducted research that led to the creation of two leadership models: *transformational* and *transactional* leadership, which focus on the needs of followers. Transformational leaders inspire and mobilize others to go above and beyond their job expectations, while transactional leaders negotiate with others through reward and punishment based on performance.

In the leadership literature, transformational leadership skills have been applied to leaders in higher education to determine their capacity to lead during complex challenges (Basham, 2012). In this study, the transformational leadership model designed by Kouzes and Posner (2002), the five practices of exemplary leadership, was applied to study presidential assistants who served as direct reports to college and university presidents and who may have implemented the strategic goals and objectives created by senior academic leaders.

The five practices of exemplary leadership are based on research conducted by Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2002) in which more than 1,300 senior and middle managers in both public and private organizations were asked to describe their personal best experiences (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Northouse, 2016; Posner, 2016). Based on in-depth interviews, Kouzes and Posner (2016) found that job titles did not matter and that everyone could be a leader when he or she becomes engaged in the five practices of exemplary leadership, which serve as the pathway to successful achievement.

The five practices of exemplary leadership is a highly reliable and valid model that has been recognized by research scholars for more than 30 years (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Posner, 2016). It is ideal for higher education institutions facing increasing challenges, because it allows senior academic leaders to delegate, learn from others, and identify and address individual needs to achieve and grow within an organization (Basham, 2012). The five practices of exemplary leadership are relevant for middle managers, as well as presidential assistants, who play a crucial role in meeting the demands in the field of higher education, because the theoretic framework provides exemplary leadership practices that have been found to be successful when working with

supervisors, peers, and subordinate staff. Posner (2016) identified that leaders who have engaged in the five practices of exemplary leadership are effective and successful leaders, and they are able to address complex challenges in organizations.

The five practices of exemplary leadership were created based on empirical research, which has been proven to be an effective model (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Posner 2016). Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership that can support higher education leaders to achieve extraordinary things are *model the way*, *inspire a shared vision*, *challenge the process*, *enable others to act*, and *encourage the heart*. The practices are described below.

Model the way. Leaders who frequently lead the way set the example and build commitment through daily interactions that create progress and momentum. Leaders have a leadership philosophy, they identify high standards, they have a set of principles of how people should be treated (constituents, peers, students, faculty, staff, etc.), and they create goals to make their organizations unique and distinctive (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Posner, 2016). Curchack (2009) stated that presidential assistants could serve as role models to support staff and senior leaders regarding effective ways to work with college and university presidents, and they could serve as a trusted resource in daily interactions with internal and external stakeholders.

Inspire a shared vision. Leaders who frequently inspire a shared vision make a difference by envisioning the future and creating an ideal and unique image of what an organization can become (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, Posner, 2016). Leaders can generate enthusiasm and excitement for a common vision from others through genuineness and skillful use of positive language and personal energy (Northouse, 2016; Posner, 2016;

Yukl, 2012). Curchack (2009) also took the position that presidential assistants can practice inspiring a shared vision by interacting daily with college and university presidents, support staff, and senior leaders and in advancing the mission and vision of the institution (Curchack, 2009).

Challenge the process. Leaders, who challenge the process, frequently create and support new ideas and show a willingness to challenge systems by taking risks and turning new ideas into action to advance an organization. Leaders are prepared to learn from their mistakes, take responsibility, and do not shift blame onto others (Northouse, 2013; Posner, 2016). Curchack (2009) suggested that presidential assistants could practice challenging the process by engaging in candid conversations on matters that could impact their institutions. Most presidential assistants serve at the pleasure of the president, and they have to have courage and confidence to provide an objective stance to college and university presidents in an appropriate setting.

Enable others to act. Leaders who frequently enable others to act use collaboration and empowerment, they involve others in planning within an atmosphere of trust, and they allow others to be involved in decision making to enable their followers to do their jobs, realize their potential, and become competent (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). In addition, leaders consider the needs and interests of others and allow others to have ownership and accountability. Presidential assistants can practice enabling others to act by encouraging staff members to accomplish their job goals with minimal supervision and by providing constructive feedback when necessary (Curchack, 2009; Posner, 2016; Yukl, 2012).

Encourage the heart. Leaders who frequently encourage the heart use encouragement and motivation to achieve the goals set by their organization. Effective leaders have high expectations for themselves and others (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Their credibility is based on their record of achievements, dedication, and daily demonstrations of what and how things can get accomplished. Leaders often attach rewards and recognition to job performance. Presidential assistants can practice encouraging the heart by finding opportunities to acknowledge support staff for outstanding job performance through annual performance evaluations and by publicly acknowledging others for extraordinary job performance (Curchack, 2009; Yukl, 2012). In summary, Kouzes and Posner's (1987, 2002) five practices of exemplary leadership are reliable, valid, and proven to help leaders accomplish extraordinary things within organizations (Northouse, 2013).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine to what extent presidential assistants engaged in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership and in the managerial functions used to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives of a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. In higher education institutions, presidential assistants play a crucial role in implementing daily goals and objectives, and they enable presidents to focus on new ways to meet the demands facing higher education institutions (Curchack, 2009).

Research Questions

This study examined the extent to which presidential assistants engaged in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership and the managerial

functions they used to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives in public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. This study answered the following questions:

1. What are the managerial functions of presidential assistants?
2. To what extent do presidential assistants in higher education institutions engage in leadership practices?
3. Are there significant differences in the leadership practices of presidential assistants based on characteristics such as gender, race, age, highest educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position?

Potential Significance

As challenges facing higher education institutions continue to increase and rapidly change, the roles and responsibilities of middle managers also increase to meet the new expectations of the academic institutions and how they support student success (Vilkinas, 2014; Waters & Hightower, 2016). Presidential assistants, who may perform similar functions as middle managers, play a crucial role in the operation of colleges and universities to help accomplish increasingly and rapidly changing goals and objectives. The results of this study will add to the body of knowledge on the leadership practices of presidential assistants in public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States and it will fill the existing research gap concerning administrative middle managers in higher education.

The results of this study are important to share with the NAPAHE (2016), because this organization provides training and development on the issues facing higher education

for presidential assistants who are members of the national association. In addition, current and newly appointed college and university presidents may find this study important to assist them in creating, developing, or enhancing job descriptions for presidential assistants in higher education institutions. This study may also help college and university presidents in assessing their presidential assistants with leadership as a component of the position.

Definition of Terms

To provide an understanding of terms used in this study, a list of words with definitions are provided.

Followers – individuals who are directed by a leader (Northouse, 2013).

Leaders – individuals who engage in directing subordinates (Northouse, 2013).

Leadership – the ability to mobilize others to act (Kouzes and Posner, 2012).

Middle Managers – academic and administrative managers, such as deans, directors, assistant directors, department heads, and registrars, who are responsible for carrying out the strategic goals and objectives set by senior-level management (Marshall, 2012; Vilkinas, 2014).

Presidential Assistants – individuals who report directly to and support the primary leader of a college and/or university. These individuals have different titles and levels of responsibilities (Curchack, 2009).

Senior Leaders – executives, such as chief executive officers, presidents, provosts, and vice presidents who are responsible for setting strategic goals and objectives (Marshall, 2012; SUNY, 2016).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an overview was provided on the new challenges facing higher education institutions and the need to have effective leaders who can implement the increased strategic goals and objectives set by senior leaders. In higher education, middle managers, such as presidential assistants, could play an important role in implementing the strategic work on campuses; however, little empirical research has been studied about this population (Stringer, 1977). This research study has five chapters. The first chapter reviews the research problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the potential significance of a study examining presidential assistants' managerial functions and leadership practices, and the definitions of the terms pertinent to this study. A review of the literature on middle managers' roles and functions, leadership behaviors and practices of middle managers, Kouzes and Posner's (2012) transformational leadership model, and the administrative and leadership skills of assistants in higher education are included in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides the research design methodology used to examine the managerial functions and leadership practices of presidential assistants. The quantitative results are reported in Chapter 4, and the implications of the results, recommendations for stakeholders, and recommendations for future research are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Significant changes are impacting higher education institutions in the United States, such as increased growth in technology, changes in the global economy and demographics, decreased fiscal resources, and an increased expectation of institutional accountability (Basham, 2012). Basham (2012) stated that senior leaders in colleges and universities need to encourage faculty, staff, and administrators in all areas of the institution to successfully address these increasingly complex challenges. Curchack (2009) suggested that presidential assistants could serve as a valuable resource to assist institutions in meeting the increasing demands and complex challenges in the field of higher education. The leadership roles and responsibilities of presidential assistants are like those of middle managers who influence, empower, and assist in the implementation of the mission and goals of the institution through the engagement of senior leaders, staff, and colleagues (Branson et al., 2016). Like middle managers, presidential assistants are challenged daily to manage across diverse populations, and research suggests that learning more about the leadership practices of these leaders could support higher education institutions to meet their strategic objectives (Branson et al., 2016; McMaster, 2014; Vilkinas, 2014).

This study examined the extent to which presidential assistants engaged in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership and the extent to which they used managerial functions to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives in

public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI; Kouzes & Posner, 2012) is an empirical instrument that was employed to measure the five practices of exemplary leadership (Posner, 2016). This instrument was chosen because of the empirical evidence that proves it is reliable, valid, and relevant to measuring leadership behaviors (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Posner, 2016). As presidential assistants take on additional leadership roles, Kouzes and Posner's (2012) transformational leadership model can be applied to their roles in public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. In general, there seems to be a gap in the research related to the managerial functions and leadership practices of presidential assistants in public higher education in the United States. In this study, the first research question seeks to examine the managerial functions of presidential assistants in public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system the Northeastern United States. The second research question seeks to determine the frequency in which presidential assistants are performing leadership practices, and the third research question seeks to determine if there are differences in leadership practices of presidential assistants based on a variety of characteristics. The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the managerial functions of presidential assistants?
2. To what extent do presidential assistants in higher education institutions engage in leadership practices?
3. Are there significant differences in the leadership practices of presidential assistants based on characteristics such as gender, race, age, highest

educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position?

This literature review provides a synopsis of the empirical research on middle managers including presidential assistants in colleges and universities. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section provides a review of the middle managers' roles and functions in higher education institutions. The second section describes the leadership behaviors and practices used by middle managers in higher education institutions. The third section looks specifically at presidential assistants and explores their administrative roles and leadership skills as middle managers, and the fourth section includes a review of the research methodologies used in the studies that are included in the literature review.

Middle Managers' Roles and Functions

The research conducted by Wallace and Marchant (2011) suggests that in higher education institutions, there are different types of middle managers: academic and nonacademic. Although the functions of middle managers are similar, they fulfill different roles in public and private institutions. Non-academic middle managers oversee various areas of the university, such as assisting with human resources and staffing, managing budgets and resources, communicating strategic initiatives with internal and external constituents, managing the daily operations of the office, and supervising staff (Vilkinas, 2011; Wallace & Marchant, 2011). Academic middle managers are responsible for overseeing academic courses and programs, managing curriculum and instruction, and supervising academic departments, staff, faculty, and students (Vilkinas, 2011; Wallace & Marchant, 2011). Several qualitative studies have been conducted to better understand

the roles and functions of academic and nonacademic managers (Davis, van Rensburg, & Venter, 2016; Floyd, 2016; Huang & Pang, 2015; Marshall, 2012; Nguyen, 2013; Pepper & Giles, 2015; Waters & Hightower, 2016). Summarized below are studies that share a focus on defining the roles and job responsibilities of middle managers.

Davis et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study at a South African public university using in-depth interviews to explore how middle managers navigate systems to accomplish strategic initiatives. The purpose of the Davis et al. (2016) study was to examine the work done by both academic and nonacademic middle managers in support of the strategic goals of their institution. At the institution where Davis et al. (2016) conducted their study, academic managers were responsible for managing faculty members, while nonacademic managers were responsible for managing the functions of departments, such as human resources, finance, and administration (Davis et al., 2016). In South Africa, the challenges of higher education have increased and are becoming more complex, which has led to the management of universities, in general, becoming more difficult (Davis et al., 2016).

The participants ($n = 17$) in the Davis et al. (2016) study included a sample of academic and nonacademic directors, department heads, and managers of nonacademic departments. To collect data, in-depth interviews were initiated to gather participants' perspectives of what managerialism feels like to middle managers and to gain an understanding of their lived experiences regarding the challenges of their work (Davis et al., 2016). The data were analyzed using a constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, and through data analysis, four themes and subthemes were identified relating to the work of middle managers (Davis et al., 2016).

For the first theme, disempowered middle managers, the participants expressed they had minimal power of authority or the inability to influence major decisions at the institution. For the second theme, changing organizational culture, the participants defined as the institution's norms, beliefs, and unwritten rules within the organizational culture.

The study contained several subthemes, including the first subtheme, collegiality, where study participants explained how middle managers had more positive relationships with their peers and subordinates than with senior management. With the second subtheme, conformance, the participants discussed the inability to be creative due to established rules and strategic goals and objectives set by senior management. With the third theme, over-articulation of the strategy, the participants expressed how senior leaders routinely used strategic plans, agendas, and reporting templates that did not achieve buy-in from staff. For the fourth theme, control at the cost of innovation and experimentation, the participants described how top-down approaches used by senior management did not encourage creativity.

With the first subtheme, systems within systems, the participants expressed the need to create their own systems instead of using existing systems that were ineffective to do their work. For the second subtheme, communication channels outside formal channels, the participants described how they developed informal groups as an opportunity to converse and resolve issues amongst their peers. With the third subtheme, structuring meetings to be more productive, the participants expressed how they decided to meet for 1 hour to stay focused and have productive committee meetings. The fourth

subtheme, peer collaboration, the participants described how they shared best practices amongst each other.

At the Davis et al. (2016) study institution, the middle managers perceived they had little influence on major decisions with work assignments being directed by senior managers, but middle managers were expected to solve problems created by others (Davis et al., 2016). Also, managerial constraints set by senior managers did not enable middle managers to accomplish their daily work. Davis et al. (2016) attributed these challenges to senior leaders who employ traditional leadership practices, and they suggested that universities could no longer rely on top-down management styles and that the universities should find ways to empower middle managers.

This study builds upon the Davis et al. (2016) findings by using Kouzes and Posner's (2012) transformational leadership model, which is not a top-down model. The Kouzes and Posner (2012) model is a collaborative approach that empowers and encourages others to lead while providing support along the way. In this study, presidential assistants self-identified how frequently they engaged in the five practices of exemplary leadership developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012) while implementing the strategic goals and objectives in a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

Similar to Davis et al. (2016), Floyd (2016) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to understand how university academic middle managers have been supported when adjusting to new and increased responsibilities in their roles. The middle managers were defined as department heads who made day-to-day decisions to carry out strategic goals that were established at a higher administrative level (Floyd,

2016). The middle managers were in a position where they carried out the expectations of senior leaders by supervising the work of subordinates (Floyd, 2016). The purpose of Floyd's (2016) study was to examine how academics became department heads in two different United Kingdom universities, how they were supported in their roles, and the difficulties they experienced. The interview questions focused on: (a) what training and role preparation were provided, and (b) how managers can be supported in the future (Floyd, 2016). Participants ($n = 28$) were a sample of academic middle managers at Hillside University, a large, modern teaching-led university in the south of England, and a sample of academic middle managers at Oakbank University, a research-led university also in the south of England (Floyd, 2016).

Floyd (2016) analyzed the data collected from the semi-structured interviews with middle managers, along with web-based profiles of the participants and documents relating to the managerial culture and work practice, using coding and thematic techniques. Floyd (2016) found three themes that emerged from the data analysis: training and role preparation, managing the workload, and the way forward. In training and role preparation, participants at both institutions expressed that department heads did not receive any formal leadership and management training to adequately prepare them for their position. The data analyzed from the theme of managing the workload recommended that both institutions needed to carefully support and provide adequate time for middle managers to manage their increasing workload, and to prepare middle managers to become future senior leaders of higher education (Floyd, 2016). The last theme, way forward, revealed that respondents at both institutions expressed that

managerial training should be customized based on the specific needs of middle managers and the culture of the institution.

Floyd's (2016) theme of training and role preparation recommended that formal leadership training is necessary for middle managers to be effective in their work, and that the employing organizations should prepare them to be future senior leaders in higher education institutions. It is important for higher education institutions to recognize that formal leadership training may be beneficial to support middle managers in their existing positions to prepare them to take on executive leadership roles in the future.

Similar to Davis et al. (2016) and Floyd (2016), Pepper and Giles (2015) conducted a qualitative study at Australian universities using semi-structured interviews to explore the perceptions of academics in positions of middle-level leadership roles. The purpose of the Pepper and Giles (2015) study was to examine how associate deans perceived their role in higher education. Pepper and Giles (2015) defined the term *middle management* as individuals in positions below dean and described as associate deans or heads of schools. The research questions focused on: (a) what were the associate deans' perceptions of their leadership role in higher education, and (b) what support structures were useful to the associate deans in higher education (Pepper & Giles, 2015). The participants ($n = 6$) in the Pepper and Giles (2015) study included a small sample of academics in the position of associate dean. To collect data, semi-structured interviews were initiated to gather participants' perspectives of associate deans' lived experiences. Pepper and Giles (2015) found several themes that emerged from the data analysis. In response to the first research question about how associate deans perceived their leadership role in higher education, Pepper and Giles's (2015) first theme, overwhelming

nature of the role, involved the challenges of working with difficult people and underachievers. The second theme, huge responsibility and little power, involved the challenges of competing expectations from senior management and subordinate staff. The third theme, reacting to events, involved dealing with issues related to staff and students, such as complaints or misconduct. The fourth theme, feeling isolated, involved the inability to consult with other staff members regarding confidential matters and not sharing issues with other members, and the final theme, leading others, involved mentoring and moving staff forward (Pepper & Giles, 2015).

In response to the second research question about what support structures were useful to associate deans in higher education, four themes were identified: participating in networks, engaging with professional development, accepting faculty support, and keeping abreast of the big picture (Pepper & Giles, 2015). The participants in the Pepper and Giles (2015) study recognized the need to stay connected with other colleagues, the importance of receiving formal training, and the importance of gaining support and knowledge from faculty about the broader aspects of higher education.

Pepper and Giles (2015) suggested that further research be done on a larger population to get broader perceptions of middle management members who are leading in higher education. This current study builds upon the Pepper and Giles (2015) study by examining another population of middle managers, specifically presidential assistants at several public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

While Davis et al. (2016), Floyd (2016), and Pepper and Giles (2015) looked at university middle managers in the context of various leadership responsibilities, Huang

and Pang (2015) conducted a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews to explore how academic managers at Chinese universities perceived and understood their managerial roles in a changing environment (Huang & Pang, 2015). Specifically, Huang and Pang (2015) examined the self-perception of academic managers through the lens of their managerial, scholarly, and bureaucratic roles, focusing on how participants perceived and internalized their role on campus.

The participants ($n = 19$) in Huang and Pang (2015) study included a sample of middle managers defined as deans, deputy deans, and heads of departments. The research questions in the Huang and Pang (2015) study focused on: (a) the perceptions of Chinese middle managers about their managerial roles, and (b) creating their role identities in a changing environment (Huang & Pang, 2015). While middle managers have various roles in higher education institutions, the interview questions allowed the middle managers to describe the various roles they carried out daily that helped the institutions understand the value middle managers bring to the institution. The roles of middle managers were described as managers who work with faculty, students, and senior leadership in the planning and implementation of key initiatives, such as managing finances and being accountable for the effectiveness of designated areas of management (Huang & Pang, 2015).

The instruments utilized in the Huang and Pang (2015) study consisted of multiple sources, such as semi-structured interview transcripts, field notes, job descriptions for middle management positions, and policies on executing managerial changes at the Chinese university. Interview data were analyzed using semi-structured interview transcripts and were collected to identify recurring codes based upon

participants' perceived management role, and the job descriptions were analyzed to understand the roles of middle managers (Huang & Pang, 2015). Based on an inductive analysis of the interview transcripts and job descriptions, Huang and Pang (2015) found the following three role identities of middle managers: scholar, bureaucrat, and manager.

In the scholar-role identity, participants identified themselves as professors, scholars, or academicians, and they considered this role to be their primary role due to the contributions they made to their discipline prior to becoming a manager (Huang & Pang, 2015). With the bureaucrat-role identity, participants interpreted the role as having power over other faculty members; however, this role was unique to colleges and universities in China's higher education institutions. In the managerial-role identity, participants described this role as being a facilitator for promoting discipline rankings, an entrepreneur when seeking funds and resources, and a supervisor when evaluating faculty performance (Huang & Pang). This current study expands upon Huang and Pang's (2015) findings regarding managerial role identity by asking presidential assistants in higher education institutions in the northeastern United States to identify their managerial functions.

While Huang and Pang (2015) focused on positions, such as deans, deputy deans, and heads of departments, who were described as middle managers in higher education in China, Nguyen (2013) conducted a qualitative study on the specific roles of heads of departments at Hanoi University of Industry, established in Vietnam in 2005. Nguyen (2013) expanded the research on university middle managers using both document analysis and semi-structured interviews. At state-operated universities in Vietnam, middle managers were defined as individuals who played an essential role and performed

day-to-day operations in the management of universities (Nguyen, 2013). The purpose of Nguyen's (2013) study was to examine the roles of the heads of departments at Hanoi University of Industry, a newly developed university. The participants ($n = 24$) were a sample of eight heads of departments, nine deputy heads of departments, five members of the board of rectors, one human resource manager, and one training manager (Nguyen, 2013).

The instruments used in Nguyen's (2013) study were semi-structured interviews and official job descriptions of the heads of departments at universities in Vietnam to understand the role of heads of departments. In reviewing the job analysis, the middle managers at Hanoi University of Industry's key duties were program management, academic staff management, and facilities management. Through data analysis, Nguyen (2015) identified three themes: role ambiguity, a lower level of autonomy, and routinely functioning more as a manager than as a leader (Nguyen, 2013). In role ambiguity, the roles of middle managers depended on their level of interest and expertise, and the roles could be different from documented job descriptions (Nguyen, 2013). In having a lower level of autonomy, middle managers were not empowered to make decisions, which prevented them from being effective managers (Nguyen, 2013). The middle managers in this role seemed to perform more as managers than leaders because their roles tended to focus on the daily administrative duties (Nguyen, 2013). Nguyen (2013) suggested that increased leadership responsibilities be given to department heads to enhance the overall performance of the university.

Nguyen's (2013) study adds value to the literature about the roles of academic and administrative middle managers in higher education at an international institution;

however, the study did not answer how middle managers implement the strategic goals and objectives of a large state higher education system in Northeastern United States, which further supported the need for this study.

While Nguyen (2013) used semi-structured interviews to learn about the roles of department heads, Marshall (2012) adopted an interpretive paradigm using a constructivist epistemology to gain knowledge about how middle leaders interpret their experiences in New Zealand's higher education institutions (Marshall, 2012). The purpose of Marshall's study was to report the outcomes from a larger study about the important roles of middle leaders of organizational change. Marshall (2012) described managers as individuals elected by organizations and given authority to oversee the strategic work of others, whereas other leaders were elected by organizations or informally elected by peers and were able to influence others to accomplish strategic goals of organizations. The participants in the Marshall study described themselves as middle managers who accomplished the daily operations of organizations by negotiating relationships with senior leadership and staff.

Participants ($n = 10$) in the Marshall (2012) study were a sample of middle managers in roles described as department and associate heads, associate deans, senior lecturers, program leaders, and leaders of service departments from New Zealand higher education institutions. The participants were asked about their perceptions of serving as a middle manager and their perceptions of middle leadership (Marshall, 2012). Marshall (2012) used the term middle leaders to describe middle managers in higher educations as being

“caught in between” or “sandwiched between” senior management to whom they have responsibility for securing the implementation of organizational policy, and lecturers who they described as colleagues or peers, and subordinates who they described as staff for whom they have some functional and often moral responsibility. (p. 513)

Various qualitative approaches were utilized, and data was collected through focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Marshall (2012) analyzed data case narratives using “elements of narrative theme analysis to investigate the inductive themes embedded within the participants’ case studies” (Marshall, 2012, p. 510). The themes identified through the data analysis were that the participants understood the need to negotiate and build relationships between senior leaders, peers, and subordinate staff to successfully engage in leading change. Additionally, Marshall (2012) found that transformational leadership behaviors are needed to empower individuals to understand what tasks need to be accomplished. This current study expands on Marshall’s (2012) findings by examining, from the perspective of presidential assistants, how they negotiated between leaders, peers, and subordinates, and how they built those relationships with staff to accomplish their managerial functions.

The previous qualitative studies examined both academic and administrative middle managers’ roles and functions at higher education institutions in foreign countries (Davis et al., 2016; Floyd, 2016; Huang & Pang, 2015; Marshall, 2012; Nguyen, 2013; Pepper & Giles, 2015). Waters and Hightower (2016) conducted a mixed-method study that examined only administrative middle managers in higher education in the United States.

The Waters and Hightower (2016) study focused on the leadership of middle managers in higher education using a mixed-method study. The purpose of their study was to define the management and leadership roles of registrars and the skills needed to function in the role of registrar (Waters & Hightower, 2016). The participants ($n = 18$) were a sample of employees from private, 4-year higher education institutions in California. Waters and Hightower (2016) described the position of registrar as a “mid-level administrator with director-level supervisory authority, who reports to a senior-level administrator, such as a vice president or president” (Water & Hightower, 2016, p. 21). The instruments used to collect the data were semi-structured interviews and an analysis of job descriptions of registrars from six institutions. Interview questions focused on the participants’ experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding the registrar role (Waters & Hightower, 2016).

Waters and Hightower (2016) found that registrars were perceived as managers and leaders within their departments. The analysis of the job descriptions supported this perception (Waters & Hightower, 2016). The skills most frequently noted as important for the role of registrar were communicator, organizer, knowledgeable, and visionary (Waters & Hightower, 2016). Waters and Hightower (2016) suggested that registrars receive professional development opportunities to enhance their leadership abilities at higher education institutions.

The Waters and Hightower (2016) study is one of the few studies that only examined administrative middle managers in the United States. The results of their study add to the gap in the literature about the roles and functions of administrative middle

managers in higher education; however, the roles and functions of presidential assistants in higher education has not been examined.

In summary, the qualitative and mixed-method studies found that some middle managers in higher education were perceived as managers and leaders within their departments, and they reported having little autonomy (Waters & Hightower, 2016), and, instead, they had to carry out the work as directed by the leaders above them (Davis et al., 2016; Floyd, 2016; Marshall, 2012). Although many middle managers are charged with carrying out strategic goals, they are not always part of the process of determining what those goals should be for a higher education institution (Davis et al. 2016; Floyd, 2016; Marshall, 2012). Some middle managers are elected an organization, and they responsible to supervise others to accomplish strategic work, while other leaders are, and can be elected by an organization, as well as peers, but they have the capacity to influence others to accomplish specific tasks (Marshall, 2012). Floyd (2016) recommended that middle managers should receive more support and training that is tailored to their positions within the organizational structure. Such training may help to address the experience of being overwhelmed and isolated in their roles (Pepper & Giles, 2015), the ambiguous nature of their roles (Nguyen, 2013), and having to cope with complex tasks (Huang & Pang, 2015).

The qualitative and mixed-method studies included in this literature review looked at a variety of academic and administrative middle management roles and functions, including registrars (Waters & Hightower, 2016), deans (Huang & Pang, 2015), associate deans or deputy deans (Huang & Pang, 2015; Marshall, 2012; Pepper & Giles, 2015), and department heads (Davis et al., 2016; Huang & Pang, 2015; Marshall,

2012; Nguyen 2013). Most of the studies used a qualitative approach, except one study that used mixed-method approach; however, none of the studies looked at the managerial roles and functions of presidential assistants in the United States.

Presidential assistants work closely with college and university presidents; therefore, it is important to know the daily functions for which they are responsible, how they are able to implement the strategic goals within higher education, and how they are able to work with multiple constituents to achieve and manage strategic initiatives by using specific leadership practices. Additionally, this current study used a quantitative method in contrast to the qualitative and mixed-method approaches that have been used to date to examine the managerial roles of middle managers in higher education. A quantitative approach was administered to obtain information more quickly and consistently from a large sample of a population that was examined and generalized.

Leadership Behaviors and Practices of Middle Managers

This section focuses on the specific behaviors and practices of middle managers in higher education. Examining specific behaviors and practices provides a more detailed description of the ways middle managers in higher education function as leaders. There are several leadership frameworks used to examine the effectiveness of leadership styles of middle managers. In a thorough review of the literature, the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass & Avolio, 1995), and the integrated competing values framework (ICVF) (Wilkins & Carter (2001, 2006) emerged as instruments that were used to determine the effectiveness of middle management leadership styles. The first section includes studies that employed Kouzes and Posner's (1987, 2002, 2012)

transformational leadership model to examine the leadership practices of middle managers in the field of higher education. The second section includes research that used the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to measure leadership behaviors of middle managers, and the third section includes studies that examined the effectiveness of leadership styles of middle managers by using the ICVF (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006).

Kouzes and Posner's Transformational Leadership Model

The studies in this section employed the Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2002, 2012) model of transformational leadership to examine the leadership practices of middle managers in the field of higher education (Goker, 2015; Tahir, Abdullah, Ali, & Daud, 2014).

Goker (2015) conducted a mixed-method study using open-ended surveys, interviews, along with the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 1988) to examine the leadership practices and behaviors exhibited by middle-level administrators at North Cyprus universities. The purpose of Goker's (2015) study was to identify the leadership practices and behaviors utilized by middle managers, identify the demographic characteristics of middle managers, and identify and compare the use of the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) based on the middle managers' demographic characteristics. The participants ($n = 60$) were a sample of department heads from academic departments within North Cyprus, located in Turkey (Goker, 2015). The instruments used to collect data included open-ended surveys and interviews to gain knowledge about the participants' lived experiences. The LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 1988) was used to examine the frequency of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership (Goker, 2015).

First, department heads responded to the 30 leadership-behavior statements to determine a mean score for each of the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Goker (2015) used an abbreviated version of the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 1988); therefore, the participants used a 5-point Likert scale to answer questions related to the leadership behavior statements:

“1” meant the leader “rarely or never” did this; “2” meant the leader did this “once in a while; “3” meant the leader “sometimes” did this; “4” meant the leader did this “fairly often”; and a response of “5” indicated the leader did this “very frequently or always.” (Goker, 2015, p. 409)

After the participants responded to the leadership behavior statements, they were asked to identify demographic characteristics, such as job responsibilities, years in the position, formal leadership training received, age, job description, and the existence of an orientation program (Goker, 2015).

Goker (2015) found that department heads at the universities used the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 1988) *fairly often* with mean scores between 3.5 and 4.5. Out of the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 1988), *enabling others to act* scored the highest with a mean score 4.33 (toward *very frequently*), which supports Kouzes and Posner’s (2012) research that leaders who use collaboration and empowerment involve others in planning within an atmosphere of trust, and they allow others to be involved in decision making to enable followers to do their job, realize their potential, and become competent (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). *Inspiring a shared vision* had the lowest mean score at 3.69, and the remaining three leadership practices had a mean score range of variation among the participants (Goker, 2015).

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the significant differences between the relationships of leadership practices and demographic characteristics. Goker (2015) found that there were no significant differences between the number of years in a position, age, teaching responsibilities, and frequency of leadership practices. The study found that department heads who completed leadership training had higher levels of frequency on certain leadership practices (Goker, 2015). In the results from the qualitative portion of the study, Goker (2015) revealed that leadership and administrative roles were not included in the department heads' job descriptions, which led to confusion by the departments heads of their own level of responsibility, and it led to the confusion of the level of the responsibility of department heads by the individuals who were being managed by such department heads. Goker (2015) recommended that further research be conducted to identify leadership and administrative roles by analyzing the job descriptions of department heads. While Goker's (2015) study adds value to the leadership literature on academic middle managers (i.e., department heads) in higher education, this current study examined if administrative middle managers (i.e., presidential assistants) in higher education institutions in the Northeastern United States frequently engaged in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) the leadership practices.

Goker (2015) conducted a mixed-method study to examine the leadership practices of middle managers using the Kouzes and Posner (1988) LPI, while Tahir et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative study using Kouzes and Posner's (2012) LPI to examine the leadership practices of middle managers at Malaysian public universities.

The purpose of the Tahir et al. (2014) study was to examine the leadership practices of department heads and whether those behaviors impacted or predicted the

department heads' level of organizational commitment (Tahir et al., 2014). The participants ($n = 430$) were a sample of department heads responsible for the supervision of staff and students; the oversight of budget, office, and space management; and, occasionally, they focused on the mission and vision of the institution (Tahir et al., 2014).

The first instrument administered to collect data in the Tahir et al. (2014) study was Kouzes and Posner's (2012) LPI that assessed the leadership practices and behaviors of department heads. Tahir et al. (2014) adapted the responses to a Likert 5-point scale to measure all five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) that included: 1 through 5, meaning almost never, seldom, occasionally, fairly often, and very frequently, respectively (Tahir et al., 2014).

The next instrument Tahir et al. (2014) used to collect data in their study was the Mowday Steers, and Porter (1979) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire that measures the state in which department heads understand and want to carry out organizational goals (Tahir et al., 2014). The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire consists of three concepts: (a) belief and acceptance of organizational goals and values, (b) willingness to exert effort for the organization, and (c) a desire to maintain membership in the organization (Tahir et al., 2014). These concepts were measured using a Likert 5-point scale, which included 1-5, meaning strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree, respectively. The relationships between the department heads' five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) and organizational commitment were analyzed through a standard regression (Tahir et al. 2014).

Tahir et al. (2014) found that the academic staff perceived their department heads as transformational leaders when leading academic departments, based on the frequency

with which the departments heads used the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The study revealed that challenging the process had the highest mean score at 3.43; followed by encouraging the heart with a mean score of 3.42; modeling the way, with a mean score of 3.33; inspiring a shared vision, with a mean score of 3.26; and the lowest, enabling others to act, with a mean score of 3.20 (Tahir et al., 2014). These findings mean that the department heads sought out opportunities and encouraged creativity and innovation of others within their academic departments. In addition, in influencing organizational commitment among academic staff, Tahir et al. (2014) found the strongest leadership practices were encouraging the heart and enabling others to act. Based on these findings, the study reveals that when department heads are given the opportunity to think creatively and engage in decision making, they have higher levels of commitment to their higher education institution (Tahir et al., 2014). Although there were no significant differences based on the demographic characteristics and the utilization of the leadership practices and organizational commitment, the study reveals that department heads in higher education institutions frequently engage in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) transformational leadership model, and they were able to enhance the performance of their institutions.

This current study supports the Tahir et al. (2014) research by also conducting a quantitative study using Kouzes and Posner's (2012) LPI to examine if presidential assistants, like department heads, utilize Kouzes and Posner's five practices of exemplary leadership at public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. Tahir et al. (2014) found that when department heads challenged the process, most frequently, they empowered staff to think critically, be

creative, and make decisions about the organization's goals and objectives, which motivated others to achieve greatness. While the Tahir et al. (2014) study was conducted in Malaysia, the results indicate that academic middle managers engage in leadership practices from occasionally to very frequently. Yet, there is a lack of research on the leadership practices of administrative middle managers in higher education institutions in the United States. This current study adds to this research gap by examining how frequently presidential assistants in higher education institutions engaged in all five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) when managing the president's office, leading staff, and implementing institutional goals and objectives. Although Tahir et al. (2014) found no impact in comparing demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and years of service, this current study explored if demographic characteristics, such as level of education, type of institution, and job functions, had an influence on the impact of the type of leadership practices employed by presidential assistants at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

While Goker (2015) and Tahir et al. (2014) examined the leadership practices of middle managers at higher education institutions that were located in foreign countries, there were significant differences in the utilization of the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Porter, 2012) between the department heads. Goker (2015) conducted a mixed-method study using open-ended surveys, interviews, along with Kouzes and Posner's (1988) LPI, while Tahir et al. (2014) used the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) to measure leadership practices, and they used the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire to measure the department heads' level of commitment to the education institution.

In measuring the five practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), Goker (2015) found that enabling others to act had the highest mean score, while Tahir et al. (2014) found challenging the process to have the highest mean score. Goker (2015) and Tahir et al. (2014) both used the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) as independent variables and measured them against dependent variables, such as demographic characteristics and organizational commitment, and found no significant differences in the utilization of the leadership practices. What was unique about both studies was the location and the type of institution that was examined. Goker's (2015) study was conducted in North Cyprus, which is located in Turkey, at a private institution, and the Tahir et al. (2014) study was conducted in Malaysia at a public institution, which reveals that although department heads may have the same job title and functions, the type of leadership practices utilized dependent upon the type of institution.

While Goker (2015) and Tahir et al. (2014) examined leadership practices of department heads in Malaysia and Turkey, this current study will add to the literature in higher education by exploring the leadership practices of presidential assistants who may also play a crucial role at public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

MLQ

While the previous quantitative studies examined how middle managers utilized Kouzes and Posner's (2002) five practices of exemplary leadership, the studies in this section employed the MLQ, developed by Bass and Avolio in 1995 (Vinger, 2009) to examine the leadership behaviors of middle managers in the field of in higher education (Abbas, Iqbal, Waheed, & Riaz, 2012; Vinger, 2009; Jones & Rudd, 2008). The MLQ

(Bass & Avolio, 1995) is a 360-degree feedback assessment where leaders receive feedback from others about their leadership style. In addition, leaders rate their own perception of their utilization of leadership behaviors. The MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) measures three different types of leadership behaviors: (a) transformational leaders build organizational commitment and empower others to achieve goals, (b) transactional leaders negotiate with followers by using rewards as incentives to achieve goals, and (c) laissez faire leaders do not engage in leadership (Abbas et al., 2012). The instrument is a validated leadership instrument, and it consists of a comprehensive assessment with 45 statements that measure the five elements of transformational leadership (Abbas et al., 2012; Vinger, 2009).

For this current study, transformational leadership behaviors were examined because leaders who utilize transformational leadership behaviors have been shown to make an impact on achieving and managing strategic initiatives at higher education institutions (Abbas et al., 2012). The five elements of transformational leadership behaviors are: (a) idealized influence attributed, which involves communicating a mission and vision and encouraging others; (b) idealized influence behavior, which involve serving as a role model; (c) inspirational motivation, which involve communicating a clear vision of future expectations; (d) intellectual stimulation, which involve creating new ways to solve existing problems; and (e) individualized consideration, which involve showing care and concern for others (Abbas et al., 2012).

The first quantitative study in this section is the Abbas et al. (2012) study that used the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to measure transformational leadership behaviors, and the Innovative Work Behavior Scale (IWBS) (Scott & Bruce, 1994). The IWBS

(Scott & Bruce, 1994) measures four constructs: (a) idea promotion involves receiving support for the execution of ideas, (b) idea generation involves creating ideas, (c) work commitment involves motivation and commitment to ideas, and (d) idea implementation involves implementing ideas in the contextual setting to measure innovative work behavior (Abbas et al. 2012).

The purpose of the Abbas et al. (2012) study was to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and innovative work behaviors among employees at educational institutions in Pakistan (Abbas et al., 2012). The five hypotheses were: (a) idealized influence attributes are positively correlated with idea generation, work commitment, and idea implementation; (b) idealized influence behavior is positively correlated with work commitment and idea implementation; (c) inspirational motivation is positively correlated with idea promotion, idea generation, and work commitment; (d) intellectual stimulation is positively correlated with idea promotion, idea generation, and idea implementation; and (e) individualized consideration is positively correlated with idea generation and implementation (Abbas et al., 2012). The participants ($n = 200$) were a sample of academic middle managers identified as teachers, lecturers, and assistant professors from Pakistani public and private colleges and universities.

Abbas et al. (2012) examined the relationship between the transformational leadership behaviors using descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for all subscales (Abbas et al., 2012). Abbas et al. (2012) found that the five transformational leadership behaviors had significant positive correlation ($p < .01$) with all four components of the IWBS (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Transformational leadership is an effective leadership behavior to apply in educational sectors because many leaders who

exhibit this leadership style are capable of encouraging followers to challenge the status quo and engage in new values and behaviors (Abbas et al., 2012). Abbas et al. (2012) posited that as leaders in higher education face new challenges, their transformational leadership style could help leaders to encourage others to be creative, provide ways to meet the new demands on institutions, to execute new ideas, and motivate others to commit to institutions' new goals and objectives. For further research, Abbas et al. (2012) suggested that the leadership styles of transactional and laissez-faire leaders should be examined to determine if other factors could influence the innovative work behavior of employees.

Vinger (2009) also used the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to conduct a quantitative study to explore transformational leadership in public higher education institutions in South Africa. Vinger (2009) explored whether middle managers exhibited transformational leadership and implemented and managed change through a reorganization structure. The participants ($n = 51$) were a sample of middle managers in higher education institutions consisting of deans, heads of department/schools, chief directors, senior directors, directors, assistant directors, and managers. They were asked to complete the questionnaire to rate their frequency of the transformational leadership behaviors. Vinger (2009) used descriptive analysis to examine the relationship between the transformational leadership behaviors and the confirmatory factor analysis to generalize the results. Vinger (2009) collected the data using the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to measure transformational leadership behaviors, and the researcher used the confirmatory factor analysis to test the psychometric characteristics of the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995; Vinger, 2009).

Vinger (2009) found that the leaders exhibited transformational leadership behaviors fairly often and identified that individualized consideration was the most frequently used behavior, which means that leaders tended to display care and concern for their employees by providing support for the betterment of their professional development. Based on this finding, Vinger (2009) concluded that middle managers at this university were capable of both initiating and managing the restructuring process successfully. Vinger (2009) suggested that a professional leadership trainer be hired to assist individuals in enhancing their leadership behavior.

The Jones and Rudd (2008) study is the third study that used the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to explore leadership styles of middle managers in higher education. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the utilization of transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles of deans, when fulfilling their daily roles and responsibilities, to discern whether there were differences relative to gender and ethnicity characteristics (Jones & Rudd, 2008). The participants ($n = 56$) were a sample of deans who led academic programs in colleges of agriculture at land-grant institutions in the United States (Jones & Rudd, 2008). To conduct their research, Jones and Rudd (2008) used Dillman's (2007) Internet and interactive voice response survey design methodology. Participants' responses were determined by scoring their responses to the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to gain an understanding of their individual leadership behavior styles.

Jones and Rudd (2008) found deans used transformational leadership behavior more frequently ($M = 3.28$) than the other leadership styles (i.e., transactional ($M = 2.24$) and laissez-faire ($M = .88$)). In terms of gender and ethnicity, there was not a significant

difference in leadership style behaviors, and Jones and Rudd recommended that higher education institutions consider hiring diverse candidates for future leadership positions (Jones & Rudd, 2008). Jones and Rudd (2008) suggested further research be conducted to determine what other factors may impact the development of leadership styles, and the researchers confirmed that middle managers who engage in transformational leadership are effective and successful leaders (Jones & Rudd, 2008).

In summary, these three quantitative studies used the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to conduct research on how middle managers, such as deans (Jones & Rudd, 2008; Vinger, 2009), teachers, lecturers, assistant professors, heads of departments/schools, chief directors, senior directors, assistant directors, and managers (Abbas et al., 2012; Jones & Rudd, 2008) used the transformational leadership style in higher education institutions. When middle managers were charged to initiate and manage the reorganizational structure of universities (Vinger, 2009), encourage or empower others to carry out new ideas, be creative and innovative to enhance the performance of institution, (Abbas et al., 2012; Jones & Rudd, 2008), the middle managers were found to use the transformational leadership style on a routine basis. Although Vinger (2009) conducted the study in South Africa, Abbas et al. (2012) conducted their study in Pakistan, and Jones and Rudd (2008) conducted their study in the United States, all middle managers in these countries exhibited transformational leadership behaviors when performing, managing, and leading in their daily work.

The research conducted by Abbas et al. (2012), Vinger (2009), and Jones and Rudd (2008) employed the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995), and they revealed that academic and administrative middle managers in a variety of countries engaged in transformational

leadership behaviors. Yet, none of the studies included presidential assistants in their sample. While these studies add value to the emerging leadership gap on the leadership behaviors of administrative middle managers in other countries, this current study examined the frequency in which presidential assistants engaged in different transformational leadership practices developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012) using the LPI.

Integrated Competing Values Framework

A third measure of leadership is used to study middle managers in higher education. In this section, there are two quantitative studies by Vilkinas (2014) and Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky (2011) who used the ICVF (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001; 2006) and one mixed-methods study conducted by Waters and Towers (2016) that used semi-structured interviews and document analysis to examine the leadership behavior of middle managers in higher education. The ICVF (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006) identifies the relationship between leadership behavior and effectiveness, and it has been used extensively to explain leadership in public and private institutions in Australia and Asia. The theoretical framework was developed by Quinn (1984) and extensive work has been done to ensure its validity.

Vilkinas (2014) conducted a quantitative study using the ICVF (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006) to examine the importance of leadership behavior among nonacademic middle managers in Australian higher education. The purpose of the Vilkinas (2014) study was to identify the leadership behaviors exhibited by nonacademic middle-level managers in the Australian higher education setting. The nonacademic middle managers were described as managers who reported to senior leadership, were

responsible for administrative units, such as executive and departmental offices, and who maintained control of the department while senior leaders focused on the vision of the institution (Vilkinas, 2014). The research questions focused on: (a) the effectiveness of middle-level managers as leaders; (b) the self-perceptions of leadership effectiveness of middle-level managers; and (c) the perceptions of middle-level managers, line managers, peers, and staff (Vilkinas, 2014). The participants ($n = 75$) were a sample of middle-level managers from 28 Australian universities who participated in a 360-degree feedback program from 816 work colleagues, consisting of 93 line managers, 464 peers, and 259 staff members to rate middle-level managers' leadership behavior. The participants completed the ICVF (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006) survey used to measure leadership effectiveness.

Vilkinas (2014) found that middle-level managers, their line managers, peers, and staff members, all perceived that middle-level managers provided effective leadership in their daily roles and responsibilities. There were differences in the perceptions of the leadership effectiveness from middle-level managers. When middle-level managers compared themselves to their work colleagues, they perceived themselves to be less effective leaders than their work colleagues (Vilkinas, 2014). Vilkinas (2014) suggested that further research needs to be conducted to gain a better understanding of the value of middle-level managers in higher education institutions, to measure the perceptions of their leadership effectiveness, and to determine the impact of leadership behaviors in their areas of responsibility (Vilkinas, 2014).

Another study by Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky (2011) used the ICVF (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006). The purpose of their study was to examine the effectiveness of

leadership behaviors of academic middle-level managers who were responsible for managing academic courses and programs in Australian higher education institutions. The participants ($n = 91$) were a sample of academic program directors who had no formal leadership authority, and their daily roles focused on completing tasks and working with colleagues, peers, and staff (Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2011).

Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky (2011) found that academic program directors rated themselves as moderately effective while their peers rated them slightly higher. Based on these findings, Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky (2011) found that academic programs leaders could enhance their leadership abilities and exhibit leadership behaviors even though their job roles did not have any formal leadership authority. Academic program directors fulfill an important role that exists in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex environment, they have a clear role to achieving short- and long-term goals, and they serve as a bridge between multiple stakeholders (Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2011). Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky (2011) suggested that leadership opportunities need to be offered to allow academic program directors to develop their leadership skills.

The two quantitative studies of Vilkinas (2014) and Vilkinas and Ladyshevsky (2011) revealed that while academic and nonacademic middle managers perform different functions, they both are deemed as effective leaders based on the results of the ICVF (Vilkinas, 2014; Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006; Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2011).

This current study examined whether middle managers, such as presidential assistants who manage and lead staff, oversee budgets and resources, and enable college and university presidents to focus on the vision and mission of institutions also provide effective leadership in their daily roles (Vilkinas, 2014; Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2011).

This current study also expanded on the findings of Vilkinas (2014) regarding how presidential assistants achieved the strategic goals of an institution without any formal power or authority and by asking presidential assistants to identify the managerial functions they performed on a daily basis and self-rated their leadership practices using the theoretical framework of Kouzes and Posner's (2012) transformational leadership model.

Administrative and Leadership Skills of Assistants in Higher Education

The literature review to this point consisted of academic and administrative middle managers in higher education, but it did not specifically study presidential assistants in higher education. The studies reviewed in this final section focus on the administrative functions of a variety of assistants in higher education in the United States (Stringer, 1977), and it includes two recent dissertations about the leadership skills of presidential assistants in higher education (Sass, 2016; Stiles, 2008).

Administrative roles of assistants. With only one published empirical study about the different job duties and titles for assistants in higher education, the managerial functions of assistants in higher education has not been studied in the past 40 years. Stringer (1977) conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews, and defining assistants as personal assistants who, in most cases, did not have any formal authority, had no supervisory responsibilities, reported to higher-level executives, and had flexible job responsibilities. The purpose of the Stringer (1977) study was to examine the use of personal assistants' roles at a large, state-supported university. The participants ($n = 45$) were a sample of personal assistants and the titles of the individuals they supported, including presidents, vice presidents, chancellors, vice-chancellors, academic deans,

associate deans, and directors of administrative (Stringer, 1977). To collect the data, participants were interviewed using closed questions, and they were asked background questions that assisted in the data interpretation (Stringer, 1977).

Stringer (1977) found six types of personal assistant positions that consisted of the titles of colleague, administrative assistant, military staff, intern, specialist, and freelance. The roles of these positions involved that colleagues made decisions on funding and long-term planning, while the administrative assistants and military staff scheduled meetings, transcribed meeting notes, and proofread course schedules (Stringer, 1977). Interns, specialists, and freelance positions provided secretarial assistance to academic deans (Stringer, 1977).

Stringer (1977) also found that the administrative assistant positions did not require any prior experience in higher education, while the colleague and military staff positions required a broad knowledge of administrative experience that was not necessarily obtained from education. The intern position was defined as an entry-level position, requiring no prior work experience. Specialists and freelance positions required prior administrative experience (Stringer, 1977). Further research was suggested by Stringer to develop a guideline for the utilization of the positions and to determine how the positions fit into the administrative structure (Stringer, 1977).

This current study, through a quantitative approach, will add to the current research regarding how the managerial functions of presidential assistants today have emerged from 40 years ago to determine what managerial functions are currently being performed. This current study conducted research on presidential assistants who reported directly to college and university presidents, and who used leadership practices to

perform their daily functions in colleges and institutions in the Northeastern United States. In light of how colleges and universities have changed over the past 40 years, the study will provide a much-needed update to what is known about the functions of presidential assistants.

Leadership skills of presidential assistants. The first dissertation about presidential assistants, conducted by Sass (2016), was a mixed-method study to explore leadership models and theories that were determined as practical for presidential assistants in higher education. The purpose of the study was to examine the lateral use of influence tactics and leadership skills that were used by presidential assistants to accomplish their roles at colleges and universities in the United States. The participants ($n = 39$) were a sample of presidential assistants identified as members of the NAPAHE in 2012-2013 (Sass, 2016). The research questions focused on: (a) what influence tactics were used most often by presidential assistants in the lateral direction to accomplish their roles, (b) what were the patterns of lateral use of influence tactics and how did they differ based on formal and informal authority, (c) what were the influence tactics used by presidential assistants in various administrative situations, and (d) what were the relationships based on demographic characteristics, such as, age, gender, ethnicity, type of institution, length of time at the institution (Sass, 2016).

The instrument used in the Sass (2016) study included a demographic and leadership characteristics survey, which focused on characteristics such as age, gender, gender of the president/chancellor, occupation prior to becoming a presidential assistant, role description, ethnicity, highest degree, length in position, and if the position was in a public or private institution. Another instrument that was used in the study was the

influence incident report form, which collected data on the influence behaviors developed by Yukl (2012), such as , interpersonal power-proactive influence model that translates the potential of power and authority into leadership action. The behaviors included in this model are rational persuasion, consultation, pressure, coalition tactics, legitimating tactics, ingratiation, inspirational appeal, apprising, collaboration, personal appeal, and exchange (Sass, 2016).

Sass (2016) found that presidential assistants most frequently used behavioral influence tactics, rational persuasion, and legitimating tactics by using logical and factual evidence as a justification to complete tasks. Presidential assistants with formal authority used the behavioral influence tactics of collaboration, personal appeal, and rational persuasion more often than presidential assistants with informal authority. Demographic characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, gender, highest degree earned, type of institution, and time in position, had no significant relationship to the behavior influence tactics used by presidential assistants. Sass (2016) also found that presidential assistants perceived that their greatest source of power was based on their level of expertise on the implementation of tasks (i.e., expert basis).

The second dissertation about presidential assistants was conducted by Stiles (2008) about the association between situational leadership styles and their sources and uses of power. The purpose of the quantitative study was to explore the sources of power and leadership styles of presidential assistants in higher education. The research question in the study focused on the association between higher education presidential assistants' sources of power and their situational leadership styles. The participants ($n = 140$) were members of the NAPAHE. The leadership instruments used for this study included a

demographic survey, which included questions related to age, gender, gender of the president/chancellor, previous occupation prior to presidential assistant, role description, ethnicity, highest degree earned, length in position, highest degree offered at institution, public or private institution, student enrollment, and membership status in the NAPAHE.

The Power Base Inventory (Thomas & Thomas, 1985) is an instrument that determines the sources of power supervisors use to make known to their followers that determines why their subordinates comply with their wishes. The survey has six power bases: (a) reward, (b) coercion (discipline), (c) legitimate (authority), (d) referent (goodwill), (e) expert, and (f) information, which is used when attempting to get a subordinate to comply with an expectation. Stiles (2008) used The Ken Blanchard Companies Leader Behavior Analysis II (Self) to evaluate situational leadership and found that most presidential assistants categorized their duties as administrative: $n = 101$ performed administrative roles; $n = 32$ performed both clerical and administrative roles; and $n = 1$ did not select any role. According to Stiles (2008), the highest degree earned was most often a master's degree ($n = 43$), followed by doctoral degrees ($n = 17$), some college course work ($n = 15$), high school diplomas ($n = 4$), and professional degrees ($n = 3$). In terms of the types of institutions, the majority of the presidential assistants surveyed ($n = 72$) were employed by public institutions; the remainder of the presidential assistants ($n = 66$) were employed by private institutions. The power bases frequently used by presidential assistants are legitimate (authority), referent (goodwill), and coercion (discipline). The situational leadership style most frequently chosen by presidential assistants was supporting, followed by coaching. Sass (2016) and Stiles (2008) examined the situational leadership style of The Ken Blanchard Companies Leader Behavior

Analysis II (citation) to evaluate situational leadership and its relationship to several demographics of presidential assistants who were identified as members of the NAPAHE; however, their studies did not examine the managerial functions of presidential assistants or the leadership practices of presidential assistants. This current study used Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership to examine the leadership practices presidential assistants used in their daily roles at public colleges and universities specifically within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

Methodological Review

The studies reviewed in this chapter provide an overview of the empirical studies conducted about middle managers in higher education. These studies included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods methodologies. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research design allows the researcher to explore and understand a problem within its context, listen to each participant's perspective, develop theories, and build connections between quantitative research from the participant's experience. In contrast, quantitative research uses measurable data to formulate facts and reveal patterns in research (Creswell, 2014). The mixed-method research design is used to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research design approaches to gain a broader understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

Several qualitative studies have been conducted to better understand the roles and functions of academic and nonacademic middle managers (Davis et al., 2016; Floyd, 2016; Huang & Pang, 2015; Marshall, 2012; Nguyen, 2013; Pepper & Giles, 2015; Stringer, 1977). These studies used semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and

interview questions to obtain the personal perspectives of middle managers located specifically in foreign countries in higher education. In using the qualitative approach, personal experiences and perceptions are articulated by the study participants.

The quantitative studies (Abbas et al., 2012; Goker, 2015; Jones & Rudd, 2008; Tahir et al. 2014; Vilkinas, 2014; Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2011; Vinger, 2009) in the literature on leadership behaviors and practices of middle managers in higher education utilized several leadership instruments that examined the effectiveness of leadership styles and behaviors: (a) ICVF (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006), (b) MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995), and (c) LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The ICVF was used to measure leadership effectiveness of academic and administrative middle managers in higher education (Vilkinas, 2014; Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006; Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2011). The MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) and LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) instruments both measure leadership behaviors, and they have been proven to be a reliable and valid assessment tools. For this study, the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) was administered to measure the leadership practices of presidential assistants employed at colleges and universities with a large education system in the Northeastern United States. The LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) has been consistently updated and re-evaluated to ensure its relevance to the current leadership landscape. At the time of this study, no empirical research was done on presidential assistants using the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). This study is the first exploration of developing an understanding of the leadership practices used in presidential assistants' daily roles and responsibilities within the institutions of higher education.

In using a quantitative approach, information is obtained faster and more consistently from a large sample of the population to be examined and generalized; however, personal experiences and perceptions are not considered when using the quantitative approach to collect data (Creswell, 2014). In reviewing the empirical studies about middle manager roles, the functions, leadership practices, and behaviors of presidential assistants in colleges and universities in the Northeastern United States were not included. In addition, there were few studies that examined the roles, functions, and leadership behaviors of administrative middle managers in the United States.

Chapter Summary

In colleges and universities, academic and administrative middle managers implement the strategic goals and objectives set by senior leaders. The empirical literature revealed that some middle managers in higher education are managers and leaders within their departments (Waters & Hightower, 2016), they have little autonomy, they carry out their work as directed by leaders above them, and they are not always part of the process in determining the goals for their higher education institutions (Davis et al., 2016; Floyd 2016; Marshall, 2012).

The literature that examined the leadership behaviors and practices of middle managers employed different leadership instruments (i.e., LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995), and ICVF (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006). In using the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 1988) to measure the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), Goker (2015) found that middle managers in higher education tend to use enabling others to act the most frequently, and Tahir et al. (2014) found that middle managers in higher education often utilized challenging the process, resulting in

the highest mean. The researchers Abbas et al. (2012), Jones and Rudd (2008), and Vinger (2009) used the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995) to measure the transformational leadership style of middle managers in higher education, and they found that all middle managers exhibited this leadership style when leading their departments and offices in their daily work. The ICFV (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006) was used to measure the leadership effectiveness of academic and administrative middle managers in higher education (Vilkinas, 2014; Vilkinas & Ladyshevsky, 2011) and revealed that while they performed different functions, both were deemed as effective leaders.

In the administrative and leadership skills of assistants in higher education, Stringer (1977) revealed six types of assistants, their different roles and function, their level of education, and the experience required. The dissertation conducted by Sass (2016) found that the sources of power reside in the presidential assistants' level of experience in the implementation of tasks, and the dissertation by Stiles (2008) found that presidential assistants' duties were administrative roles, and they had varying educational level of degrees.

In this chapter, relevant and related research was explored that examined the leadership practices, behaviors, and functions of middle managers in colleges and universities. Based on the literature review of the relevant and related empirical research for this study, a quantitative research study was performed to examine the leadership practices and managerial functions of presidential assistants employed at colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. In Chapter 3, the research design for this study is outlined.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

College and university presidents need to encourage faculty, staff, and administrators in all areas of an institution to successfully address increasingly complex challenges currently facing higher education institutions (Basham, 2012). Middle manager positions, such as presidential assistants, may be able to serve as a valuable resource to assist presidents in meeting the increasing demands and complex challenges in the field of higher education. The roles and responsibilities of middle managers are to influence, empower, and assist in the implementation of the mission and goals of the institution through the engagement of staff and colleagues (Branson et al., 2016). Middle managers are challenged daily with the need to respond to diverse populations. Research suggests that learning more about the leadership practices and behaviors of these leaders could better equip higher education institutions in meeting the strategic objectives of their organizations (Branson et al., 2016; McMaster, 2014; Vilkinas, 2014). This study examined the extent to which presidential assistants engaged in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership and the extent to which they used their managerial functions to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives in colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

In higher education institutions, presidential assistants can play a crucial role in achieving daily goals and objectives, while presidents focus on new ways to meet the

demands facing higher education institutions (Curchack, 2009). This study answered the following questions:

1. What are the managerial functions of presidential assistants?
2. To what extent do presidential assistants in higher education institutions engage in leadership practices?
3. Are there significant differences in the leadership practices of presidential assistants based on characteristics such as gender, race, age, highest educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position?

For this study, the dependent variables were the five practices of exemplary leadership of Kouzes & Posner (2012), that is, model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart, and the independent variables were gender, race, age, highest educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position.

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative survey, designed to provide a numerical description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of the given population. The results were used to generalize or draw inferences to the population (Creswell, 2014). Surveys are useful when the focus is on a set of predetermined questions and the answers are identified using numeric codes (Singleton & Straits, 2005); therefore, the survey design method was chosen to allow presidential assistants to access the survey through multiple electronic devices, such as smartphones, computers, or tablets, rather than using a paper-and-pencil survey. The research design was cross-sectional because the data collected were from

presidential assistants at one point in time, capturing varying levels of gender, race, age, highest educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position (Creswell, 2014).

Research Context

This study included presidential assistants employed at colleges within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. At the time of this writing, the public state higher education system had 64 institutions that included: university centers (14), university colleges (13), technology colleges (7), and community colleges (30). The education system is state operated, serves a large student body, and offers a variety of academic courses and programs in the Northeastern United States. This system is committed to providing high-quality education and affordable tuition to students in the Northeastern United States and beyond.

Procedures for Data Collection

Following approval from the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board, data were collected over a 2-week period in spring 2018 by using convenience sampling. Presidential assistants employed at colleges within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States were electronically invited to complete the online survey. The researcher sent a cover letter (Appendix A) to potential participants that explained the purpose of the study, and it included details for completing the survey. The survey link was included in the cover letter to the potential participants with a 2-week deadline to complete the survey. Prior to responding to survey questions, informed consent (Appendix B) was completed electronically and sent to the researcher. One week after the survey was distributed, an e-mail reminder (Appendix C) was sent to the

potential participants who had not completed the survey before the deadline. The day before the deadline to complete the survey, a final e-mail (Appendix D) was sent to the potential participants. Following the close of the survey, only 20 participants had completed the survey; therefore, data collection was extended by 2 weeks to obtain an adequate sample size for the data analysis. Following the deadline extension of the online survey, 36 surveys were obtained.

Research Participants

The participants ($N = 36$) for this study consisted of presidential assistants who reported directly to college and university presidents and, at the time of this study, worked in the offices of the presidents at higher education institutions. The presidential assistants with the titles of *administrative assistant to the president*, *assistant to the president*, *associate to the president*, *chief of staff*, *executive assistant to the president*, *executive associate to the president*, and *special assistant to the president*, participated in this survey. Because the sampling frame (i.e., presidential assistants at public colleges and universities in a single state) was limited, it reduced the possible sample size for the study.

Although the sample size was small for a quantitative study, two factors make it acceptable. First, a response rate between 25-30% is typical and considered an adequate representation (Newton & Rudestam, 2013). In this study, the response rate was 41%, reflecting an adequate sample size for generalizability. Second, the central limit theorem that underlies parametric statistical analyses, such as those used in this study, indicates that a sample size of at least 30 is needed to obtain statistically reliable results (Urduan, 2010). In this study, the sample size of 36 meets that requirement.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection in this study was an electronic web-based survey that consisted of 41 questions that were embedded into three sections: the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), demographic and professional characteristics, and managerial functions (Appendix E). An electronic survey was used to provide a numerical description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of the presidential assistants' daily managerial functions and the utilization of leadership practices. The researcher had access through St. John Fisher College to use Qualtrics to create and distribute the web-based survey, and she received permission to use Kouzes and Posner's (2012) LPI to measure the leadership practices of the presidential assistants. Permission to use the online version of the LPI was obtained from John Wiley & Sons. The electronic instruments used to create this survey made it appropriate to answer the research questions and to generalize and draw inferences regarding the study participants.

The first section of the survey was the LPI, developed by Kouzes and Posner (2012), that measured the frequency with which the participants reported they engaged in leadership practices. The LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) has six behavior statements for each of the five practices of exemplary leadership (i.e., model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart) for a total of 30 statements (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). The six behaviors were evaluated using a 10-point Likert scale of self-perceived frequency ranging from 1 – almost never engages in the behavior to 10 – almost always engages in the behavior. A subscale was calculated for each of the five practices of exemplary leadership by summing the self-ratings. The

summed scores ranged from 6 to 60. The higher numbers indicated more frequent use of the leadership practices.

The reliability and validity of the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) instrument has been tested over time, and it has been found to be an excellent measurement of leadership behaviors (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Reliability is a measure of error that causes scores to differ for reasons unrelated to the individual participants (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The fewer the errors, the more reliable the instrument, and reliabilities above .70 are considered credible (Urdu, 2012). The reliabilities of the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) are consistently above .70, and the reliability coefficient of the LPI is between .75 and .87 (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument is measuring what it intends to measure and whether the scores have meaning or value for the respondent (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Based on their evaluation of the LPI, Kouzes and Posner (2002) found it to have face validity. Also, the validity has been measured empirically by a factor analysis that is used to determine to what extent the instrument items measure the same or different content areas (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

The second section of the survey asked the participants to provide demographic and professional characteristics information. The researcher created this portion of the survey to identify the makeup of presidential assistants in colleges and universities within a state higher education system in the Northeastern United States and to test whether there were relationships between individual characteristics and the use of specific leadership practices. The seven questions assessed gender, race, age, highest educational level, type of institution, current position title, and years in the position.

The third section of the survey asked the participants to identify their managerial functions. The managerial functions section was created by the researcher and designed to gather the daily roles and responsibilities of the presidential assistants in higher education compared to middle managers in higher education, which consisted of 11 items. The participants responded to the questions using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – never engages in the function to 5 – daily engages in the function. Higher numbers reflected more frequent performance of that function. The managerial functions section was developed based on the document analysis of job descriptions found on the websites of higher education institutions, as well as job descriptions found in the current literature about the managerial functions of presidential assistants and middle managers in higher education (Branson, Franken, & Penny, 2016; Curchack, 2009; McMaster, 2014; Rushumbu, 2014; Stringer, 1977; Waters & Hightower, 2016). The survey instrument was designed for the presidential assistants to complete within 10-15 minutes, at their convenience, using electronic devices such as smartphones, computers, or tablets.

Procedures for Data Analysis

The data from Qualtrics were exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program, which was used to conduct the data analysis for this study. Prior to data analysis, the data were screened for missing data and outliers (Cronk, 2016). The LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) scores were calculated and screened for a normal distribution.

Research Question 1 asked presidential assistants how often they performed managerial functions. Two functions (i.e., providing supervision and serving on an executive team) were dichotomous questions and the frequency of the yes/no responses

was calculated. The remaining functions were analyzed categorically, calculating the frequency with which the respondents said they performed the function *never/a few times, monthly, or weekly/daily*.

Research Question 2 asked presidential assistants to what extent they engaged in the five practices of exemplary leadership, and those scores were determined by calculating subscale scores for each of the five practices of exemplary leadership and then calculating the means and standard deviations for each practice. This calculation indicated which leadership practices were used more than others.

Research Question 3 determined if there were significant differences in the leadership practices of presidential assistants, based on the demographic characteristics of gender, race, age, highest educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position. The demographic and professional characteristics were analyzed using a series of bivariate correlations and one-way ANOVAs. Bivariate correlations were used when the individual characteristics were scaled variables, which included age and years in the position. In these analyses, both the individual demographic, the professional characteristics, and the LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 2012) scores were scaled variables, making a Pearson correlation the appropriate test.

The relationships between gender, race, title, and type of institution (the independent variables) and leadership practices (the dependent variables) were tested utilizing a series of one-way ANOVAs. These tests analyzed whether there were significant differences between groups in their use of leadership practices. In these analyses, the demographic variables were categorical, and the LPI (Kouzes & Posner,

2012) scores were scaled variables, which made the one-way ANOVA the appropriate test.

All online data provided by the participants is kept confidential and secured on a password-protected computer in a file that requires a login with a username and password, and all data will remain this way for 3 years after the publication of this work. The researcher is the only person who has access to the online data collected from the presidential assistants. Any personal information obtained from the presidential assistants was removed from the data set.

Chapter Summary

This study examined what leadership practices and managerial functions were used to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives by presidential assistants in public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. The instruments used to collect the data consisted of the LPI designed by Kouzes and Posner (2012) and the demographic and professional characteristics, and the managerial functions developed by the researcher. The data were analyzed using SPSS software to conduct bivariate correlations, one-way ANOVAs, and descriptive statistics. The quantitative results are presented in Chapter 4 with a full discussion of the findings and recommendations to stakeholders and for further research in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

This study examined the managerial functions performed by presidential assistants, the frequency with which they engaged in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership, and the relationship between that engagement and the presidential assistants' organizational and individual characteristics. This chapter presents the results of the study based on statistical analysis from the data collected from an electronic web-based survey. After descriptive analyses were conducted, the data were analyzed using a series of one-way ANOVAs to determine if there were statistically significant relationships among the variables. The analyses answered the following research questions:

1. What are the managerial functions of presidential assistants?
2. To what extent do presidential assistants in higher education institutions engage in leadership practices?
3. Are there significant differences in the leadership practices of presidential assistants based on characteristics such as gender, race, age, highest educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position?

These research questions were answered through a series of analyses that included frequencies, means, standard deviations, ANOVAs, and bivariate correlations.

Descriptive Results

Via a link, the electronic web-based survey was sent to presidential assistants who were employed in public colleges and universities within a state higher education system in the Northeastern United States and whose names were obtained from a university system website ($N = 88$). Of that population, 36 presidential assistants ($n = 36$) responded to the survey, indicating a response rate of 41%. As shown in Table 4.1, the title of the respondents were most often executive assistant (29.3%), followed by assistant to the president (24.4%), and chief of staff (17.1%). The remaining respondents identified their professional roles as administrative assistant (4.9%) and associate to the president (2.4%). There were respondents (9.8%) whose titles differed from the prescribed titles (e.g., corporate secretary, executive assistant to the president and secretary to the board, executive officer manager, and executive secretary to the president). This information reflects that most of the presidential assistants in this study served in a senior level or advisor role to the college or university presidents (Curchack, 2009).

Also, shown in Table 4.1, the highest degree earned was most often a master's degree (30.6%), followed by bachelor's degree (25%), with an additional number of participants (11%) having a doctoral degree. This indicates a high level of education among presidential assistants. The remaining respondents had earned an associate degree (13.9%) and obtained high school diploma (5.6%). Most of the presidential assistants in this study worked at institutions that offered associate degrees (46.3%), bachelor's degrees (31.7%), or master's degrees (41.5%). This reflects a wide range in the types of institutions represented. Most respondents were women (86.1%) and the remainder of respondents (13.9%) were men, reflecting a notable gender disparity. In terms of race, the

participants were predominately White (91.7%) with only 8.3% identifying as African Americans. Only 5.6% of the participants identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino. This reflects considerable homogeneity in terms of race and ethnicity. Table 4.1 provides the complete results of the demographic and professional characteristics of the participants in this study.

Table 4.1

Categorical Demographics

Variable	N	(%)
Current Title		
Administrative Assistant	2	4.9
Assistant to the President	10	24.4
Associate to the President	1	2.4
Chief of Staff	7	17.1
Executive Assistant	12	29.3
Other	4	9.8
Highest Education Level		
High School	2	5.6
Associate	5	13.9
Bachelor's	9	25.0
Master's	11	30.6
Doctorate	4	11.1
Academic degrees offered at institutions		
Associate	19	46.3
Bachelor's	13	31.7
Master's	17	41.5
Doctorate	6	14.6
Technical/Certificate	10	24.4
Gender		
Female	31	86.1
Male	5	13.9
Race		
African American	3	8.3
White	33	91.7
Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic/Latino	2	5.6

Note. N = 36

As shown in Table 4.2, the age of the respondents ranged between 30 and 69 years old, and the time in their current position ranged from 1 to 33 years.

Table 4.2

Scaled Demographics

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	30	69	52.89	8.53
Years in Position	1	33	9.60	7.79

The first research question asked respondents to identify the managerial functions they used in their current positions, which consisted of 11 items. The participants responded to the questions using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*never engages*) to 5 (*daily engages*) in the function. To obtain the results, data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. First, the respondents indicated if they provided supervision or served on the executive team of the president (Table 4.3). Almost two-thirds (66%) of the participants indicated that they served on the executive team of the president.

Table 4.3

Presidential Assistants who Supervise and Serve on Executive Team

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Provide Supervision	21	60
Serve on Executive Team	23	64

Note. A higher number reflects more frequent performance of the function.

According to Curchack (2009), the functions of presidential assistants may vary based on position title, size and type of institution, and the needs of the college or

university president. The positions of presidential assistants (i.e., assistant to the president, executive associate to the president, chief of staff, and executive assistant to the president) may perform functions that are more managerial or are at an executive level. Individuals in these positions perform functions such as collaborating with others to solve problems created by others; serving as a liaison between the president and students, faculty and staff; providing insight to the president on unfavorable decisions; working with staff to implement strategic plans; representing the president on internal and external committees; and drafting communications for the president (Curchack, 2009). In contrast, the functions of some presidential assistants (i.e., administrative assistant) may be more secretarial and clerical in nature such as managing the president's calendar and serving as the liaison to the board of trustees (Curchack, 2009).

The variation in job responsibilities for professionals in these positions depends on the need of the college and university presidents, and this highlights the need for a deeper understanding of these positions at public higher education institutions.

Presidential assistants are professionals who need to have strong administrative and executive-level skills as well as secretarial or clerical skills, in some cases, depending on the position (Curchack,2009). In addition, based on the need for collaboration between faculty, staff, and students to meet the strategic goals of the institution, these positions require leadership skills. Given that there is little research supporting the claim that presidential assistants use leadership skills daily to execute their job responsibilities, this current study adds to the body of research about the leadership practices utilized by presidential assistants as well as the managerial functions performed by presidential

assistant employed in colleges and universities within at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

As shown in Table 4.4, the participants indicated how frequently they performed specific managerial functions. More than three-fourths (75%) of the respondents indicated that they collaborate with others to solve problems (92%); they serve as a liaison between the president and students, faculty, and staff (89%); or they manage the president’s calendar (78%). Approximately half of the respondents indicated that they provided insight on unfavorable decisions (56%), served as a liaison to the institution’s board of trustees (56%), worked with staff to implement the strategic plan (56%), and, drafted communications on behalf of the president (50%). A limited number of respondents indicated that they represented the president on external committees (14%).

Table 4.4

Managerial Functions Frequently Performed

Variable	Never/Few Times	Monthly	Weekly/Daily
Collaborate to solve problems	8.4%	0%	92%
Serve as liaison to the president	6.0%	6%	89%
Manage president’s calendar	14.0%	8%	78%
Provide insight on unfavorable decisions	39.0%	8%	56%
Serve as liaison to board of trustees	36.0%	8%	56%
Work with staff to implement strategic plan	33.0%	11%	56%
Draft communications	31.0%	19%	50%
Represent president on internal committees	31.0%	26%	29%
Represent president on external committees	67.0%	19%	14%

Note. A higher number reflects more frequent performance of the function.

The second research question measured the leadership practices using a 10-point Likert scale to answer questions related to 30 leadership-behavior statements ranging from 1 (*almost never engages*) to 10 (*almost always engages*) in behavior. A subscale was calculated for each of the five practices of exemplary leadership by summing the self-ratings. The summed scores could range from 6 to 60. The leadership practice that respondents most strongly endorsed was enabling others to act ($M = 51.29, SD = 6.31$). The leadership practices of encourage the heart ($M = 48.45, SD = 8.09$), model the way ($M = 47.27, SD = 7.86$), and challenge the process ($M = 45.72, SD = 9.22$) were endorsed slightly less but to a similar degree. The weakest endorsement was to inspire a shared vision ($M = 38.78, SD = 11.11$). The leadership practices mean and deviations for all practices are reported in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Leadership Practices Descriptive Statistics

Scale	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Model the way	23	57	47.27	7.86
Inspire a shared vision	20	57	38.78	11.11
Challenge the process	28	58	45.71	9.22
Enable others to act	29	60	51.29	6.31
Encourage the heart	27	59	48.45	8.09

ANOVA Results

The third research question examined if there were any significant differences in leadership practices based on education level, supervisory responsibility, and service on the president’s executive team. The one-way ANOVAs analyses found statistical

significance differences between presidential assistants who supervised employees versus those who did not supervise employees to inspire a shared vision ($F = 4.16, p = .04, \eta^2 = .11$), enable others to act ($F = 4.75, p = .03, \eta^2 = .13$), and encourage the heart ($F = 5.15, p = .03, \eta^2 = .14$). Those significant differences were such that the presidential assistants who supervised employees reported more use of each of those leadership practices. All other comparisons were not significant. All other relationships were not significant. The ANOVA results based on the leadership practices are found in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Leadership Practices Based on Education, Supervision, and Executive Team

Scale	Educational Level		Supervision		Executive Team		
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Inspire a shared vision	.71	.62	4.16	.04	2.41	.130	.11
Enable others to act	1.89	.12	4.75	.03	4.06	.052	.13
Encourage the heart	1.49	.22	5.15	.03	.570	.450	.14

The descriptive statistics results for significant differences that were based on the utilization of leadership practices and presidential assistants who provided supervision for employees are found in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics for Significant Differences Between Presidential Assistants Who Supervised vs. Presidential Assistants Who Did Not Supervise

Scale	Supervise Mean	Do Not Supervise Mean
Inspire	42.48	35.00
Enable	53.19	48.64
Encourage	50.57	44.5

Bivariate Correlations Results

Statistical analyses were conducted to see if there were significant correlations between leadership practices and scaled demographic variables. The only significant correlation was between model the way and age ($r = -.34$, $p = .07$). The relationship was such that as age increased, the participants' endorsement of model the way decreased. The strength of the relationship was moderate as found in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

Leadership Practices and Scaled Demographic Variables

Scale	Age	Years of Experience
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Model the way	-.34*	.07
Inspire a shared vision	-.25	-.10
Challenge the process	-.23	-.19
Enable others to act	.18	-.17
Encourage the heart	.20	-.06

Note. * $p < .05$

Summary of Results

This chapter reported the findings of the study that examined the leadership practices and managerial functions of 36 presidential assistants employed at public colleges and universities within in a large state higher education in the Northeastern United States. Descriptive statistics and a series of one-way ANOVAs and bivariate correlations were conducted. The results of the analyses demonstrated that the presidential assistants responded that they mostly frequently engaged in collaborating with others on a daily and weekly basis to solve problems. The second most frequent managerial functions in which the presidential assistants engaged was in providing

insight on unfavorable decisions, serving as a liaison to the board of trustees, and working with staff to implement the strategic plan. The managerial function that the presidential assistants did not engage in on a frequent basis was representing the president on internal and external committees. In addition, the study found that almost two-thirds (66%) of the presidential assistants provided supervision to employees and served on the executive team of the president.

Of the five practices of exemplary leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), the presidential assistants reported most frequently using enable others to act, followed by encourage the heart, model the way, and challenge the process. The leadership practice that was less frequently used was inspire a shared vision. The results of this study also found that presidential assistants who provided supervision to employees more frequently used the leadership practices of enabling others to act, encouraging the heart, and inspiring a shared vision.

Finally, the analyses looked for significant differences in the leadership practices of the presidential assistants based on characteristics such as gender, race, age, highest educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position. The results indicate that statistically significant differences existed for the leadership practice, model the way, and the scale of demographic age; such that, as age increased, the participants' endorsement of model the way increased. The implications of the results are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Presidential assistants have functioned in the capacity of middle managers; however, little empirical research has examined the managerial functions of this position (Stringer, 1977) and how presidential assistants may perform as leaders in higher education institutions in the Northeastern United States. It is vital to have a better understanding of the current leadership practices of presidential assistants and how they can be relied upon to meet the strategic goals and initiatives of colleges and universities. Middle manager positions, such as presidential assistants, can serve as a valuable resource to assist institutions in meeting the increasing demands and complex challenges in the field of higher education. The roles and responsibilities of middle managers are to influence, empower, and assist in the implementation of the mission and goals of the institution through the engagement of staff and colleagues (Branson et al., 2016). Daily, middle managers are challenged to manage up, down, and across diverse populations, and research suggests learning more about the leadership practices of these leaders could support higher education institutions in meeting the strategic objective of their organizations (Branson et al., 2016; McMaster, 2014; Vilkinas, 2014).

This study examined the extent to which presidential assistants engaged in Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership and the extent to which they used managerial functions to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives in public colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the

Northeastern United States. In higher education institutions, presidential assistants play a crucial role in implementing daily goals and objectives, as presidents focus on new ways to meet the demands facing higher education institutions (Curchack, 2009). A quantitative survey designed to provide a numerical description of trends, attitudes, or opinions was used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the managerial functions of presidential assistants?
2. To what extent do presidential assistants in higher education institutions engage in leadership practices?
3. Are there significant differences in the leadership practices of presidential assistants based on characteristics such as gender, race, age, highest educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position?

Chapter 5 is divided into four sections. The first section examines the implications of the findings from the survey. The second section explores the limitations of the study. The third section includes recommendations for future research, and the last section provides an overview of the study.

Implications of Findings

There were several findings that emerged from this research study that corresponded with the research questions. The first finding related to managerial functions and the types of managerial functions presidential assistants engage in when carrying out their duties. The study found that more than three-quarters (75%) of the respondents indicated that they collaborated with others to solve problems; served as liaison between the president, students, faculty, and staff; and managed the president's

calendar. More than half (56%) of the respondents indicated that they provided insight on unfavorable decisions, served as a liaison to the board of trustees, worked with staff to implement the strategic plan, and drafted communications on behalf of the president.

The second finding relates to the leadership practices utilized by presidential assistants and indicates that the respondents most strongly endorsed enabling others to act. Other leadership practices favored by the presidential assistants surveyed included encourage the heart, model the way, and challenge the process. The third finding indicated that there were significant differences between the respondents who supervised employees versus those who did not supervise employees in the utilization of their leadership practices within their daily interactions.

The findings from this study provide several implications relating to the managerial functions and leadership practices of presidential assistants in higher education institutions. The implications for professional practice for presidential assistants in higher education is addressed in this section. This section also discusses the findings of the study in the context of presidential assistants and senior leadership at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States.

Research. From the current study, the results of the managerial functions performed by presidential assistants are equal, or similar, to the studies conducted with academic and administrative middle managers, such as academic deans, directors, coordinators, and registrars in higher education institutions in the United States and foreign countries.

Middle managers are responsible for communicating the strategic goals and objectives received from senior leadership, and they are expected to implement and

execute the goals through collaboration with the staff. This is also true for some presidential assistants in higher education who are also responsible for leading, guiding, and monitoring work for individuals in the president's office (Curchack, 2009). Other middle managers, such as academic dean, director, coordinator, and registrar positions have been studied; however, the position of presidential assistants, who have similar supervisory responsibilities to academic deans, directors, coordinators, and registrars have not been studied. In this study, the managerial functions of the presidential assistants at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States varied among the institutions. The study findings indicate that managerial functions of the presidential assistants at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States mostly perform these types of functions. This implies that presidential assistants have similar roles and responsibilities as other academic and administrative positions within higher education institutions, but they may not view themselves, or be viewed, as having similar authority and influence in the institution.

In this study, the literature indicates that individuals who used Kouzes and Posner (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership could serve as effective leaders. These leadership practices could be used by presidential assistants in their daily responsibilities to increase the impact and effectiveness in their support of the institutions mission and vision. This study reveals that presidential assistants who supervised had more experience and were older in age, and they were most likely to endorse modeling the way. Younger, less-seasoned presidential assistants may not view their role in the institution as having the power and influence of a leader, which limits the impact they are able to make in their roles. This implies that the job description of presidential assistants should be reviewed

and revised to include responsibilities for leadership and influence in the institution. Additionally, professional development for professional assistants should focus on leadership best practices and how to use them in the role of a leader. This study also revealed that the leadership practice inspiring the vision was scored very low for presidential assistants, which implies that presidential assistants, although they are part of the executive team, may not be included decision making like senior functional leaders.

Managerial roles and functions. From this study, the results of the responses to the managerial functions by the presidential assistants were similar to the literature that looked at academic and administrative positions such as registrars, deans, associate deans, deputy deans, and department heads at public and private higher education institutions (Davis et al., 2016; Floyd, 2016; Huang & Pang, 2015; Marshall, 2012; Nguyen 2013; Pepper & Giles, 2015; Stringer, 1977; Waters & Tower, 2016). In this study, among all the managerial functions performed by presidential assistants, a significant number of the functions were performed most frequently on a weekly and daily basis: (a) collaborating with others to solve problems; (b) serving as liaison between the president and students, faculty, and staff; (c) managing the president's calendar; and, (d) providing supervision of the office staff (Curchack, 2009; Stringer 1977). The study of Davis et al. (2016) found that academic and nonacademic middle managers perceived they had little influence on major decisions, with work assignments being directed by senior managers, and they were expected to solve problems created by others. This implies that senior leaders should consider collaborating with presidential assistants and academic and nonacademic managers to empower presidential assistants to participate in

major decisions to mitigate the number of problems on the campus community at colleges and universities.

The second implication is that presidential assistants spend a significant amount of time serving as the liaison between the president and internal campus constituents. According to Curchack (2009), some presidential assistants act as advisors, troubleshooters, or ombudsman handling the daily tasks, such as complaints or personnel issues, which allows college and university presidents to focus on issues such as philanthropic initiatives to raise funds for the college. In addition, the study conducted by Marshall (2012) focused on the perceptions of academic middle managers who were described as department heads, associate heads, associate deans, senior lecturers, program leaders, and leaders of service department from a higher education institution. Marshall (2012) examined how these middle managers collaborated with leaders, peers, and subordinates to accomplish daily functions. This implies that presidential assistants at higher education institutions in the Northeastern United States both routinely and frequently serve as liaisons between college and university presidents and faculty, staff, and students to accomplish the daily tasks at the institutions. In this liaison role, presidential assistants have the ability to be influencers and to assist in championing the vision and strategic goals of the president, and utilizing leadership best practices will assist them in this role.

Third, some presidential assistants have the responsibility of managing the president's calendar. According to Stringer (1977), managing the president's calendar is an important task that ensures the president's work life is appropriately managed. Previous studies have identified this function as being performed by administrative

assistants to the president. In this study, the presidential assistants with various titles including administrative assistant to the president, assistant to the president, associate to the president, chief of staff, executive assistant to the president, executive associate to the president, and special assistant to the president, indicated they routinely and frequently managed the president's calendar. The current study implies that managing the presidents' calendars still remains a significant function of some presidential assistants at this large state higher educational system in the Northeastern United States.

The final significant function performed by presidential assistants in higher education is that some provide supervision of staff on a weekly and daily basis, which is similar to the Wallace and Marchant (2011) and Vilkinas (2011) studies where academic middle managers supervise academic departments, staff, faculty, and students in addition to overseeing academic courses, and managing curriculum and instruction. This implies that the managerial functions of presidential assistants are similar to academic and administrative middle managers, who also supervise staff and perform many other functions at their colleges and universities. This is a vital position to college and university presidents at higher education institutions, and it is important to understand the administrative roles and leadership capacity of presidential assistants who have the responsibility of inspiring and empowering others to go above and beyond expectations for the betterment of the higher education institutions.

Leadership Practices

This section provides the implications for the leadership practices of presidential assistants employed at colleges and universities within a large education system in the Northeastern United States. The results of this study show that presidential assistants are

an effective leadership group within public higher education institutions, and they need to be recognized for their leadership role because of their daily interactions in collaborating with others to solve institutional problems and for their service as a liaison between college and university presidents and the internal campus constituencies (i.e., faculty, staff, and students). Presidential assistants work in close proximity and relationship to college and university presidents, and attention to training and development opportunities should be considered to further develop presidential assistants' leadership capabilities to support senior management (Vilkinas, 2014).

Based on the results of this study, presidential assistants employed at colleges and universities within a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States utilized each of the five practices of exemplary leadership of Kouzes and Posner (2012). The leadership practice most strongly endorsed was enabling others to act. This leadership practice invites others to participate in the decision making, which in turn creates an atmosphere of trust. The Goker (2015) study examined department heads at higher education institutions and found that department heads who most frequently used enabling others to act had participated in leadership training. This correlates with the research of Kouzes and Posner (2012) in that trust in leaders is necessary for individuals to consistently build effective working relationships. This implies that presidential assistants, specifically the presidential assistants who provided supervision, know the importance of engaging others and empowering them to independently complete tasks. It is also important that college and university presidents recognize that presidential assistants use enabling others to act because most presidential assistants collaborate with others to solve problems, and they engage others in completing assignments. The study

conducted by Tahir et al. (2014) found that department heads who enabled others to act were able to collaborate by sharing common goals, which encouraged and empowered managers to participate in decision-making processes. This implies that college and university presidents who empower their presidential assistants allow them to make decisions and be committed to the goals of the institution.

The second implication of these findings is that presidential assistants at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States scored significantly low in inspiring the shared vision. Leaders who use this practice believe that they can make a difference by envisioning the future and creating an ideal and unique image of what the organization can become and inspire the vision in others. Curchack (2009) indicated that presidential assistants can practice inspiring a shared vision by interacting daily with college and university presidents, support staff, and senior leaders, and they can advance the mission and vision of the institution. This suggests that some presidential assistants in this study were not involved in sharing the vision at their institutions—this could be a missed opportunity for college and university presidents—particularly in light of the changing environment of higher education. Given that the presidential assistants in this study collaborated with others to solve problems, it would be important for them to be able to share the vision of the college with others who they work with to ensure everyone understands the common goal and understands the importance of working together to achieve that goal. This should be further studied to gain a better understanding of why this leadership practice is not utilized more frequently by presidential assistants at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States. Presidential assistants could serve as valuable resources to college and university presidents if they are initially

engaged in conversations about decision making and could communicate the vision of the institution because of their ability to collaborate with others. Presidential assistants are relationship builders, and they could use those relationships to provide feedback and information about the mindset of the campus community.

The third implication of these findings is about the significant differences in the frequency of leadership practices of presidential assistants based on demographics such as gender, race, age, highest educational level, current position title, type of institution, and years in the position. The results of this study found that the only significant correlation was between model the way and age. Leaders who modeled the way set the example as to how others should be treated, carry out the values of the college, and demonstrate how others should act at the institution. This study suggests that presidential assistants who are more mature in age have the capacity to demonstrate to others how to interact with college and university presidents, and are knowledgeable about the operations of the institution. This implies that presidential assistants between the average age of 30 to 69 years old and who have more than 30 years of work experience more frequently use the leadership practice model the way than other presidential assistants who are younger and have less years of experience. This may be an opportunity to redefine or rethink the job description and provide professional development to presidential assistants. The more seasoned presidential assistants feel more comfortable modeling the way because of their longevity and maturity; younger and newer presidential assistants will need more clarity about the role, the impact their role can have, and how to be a leader in his or her position. As millennials began to enter the workforce, the roles of presidential assistants at higher education institutions will need to

be clearly defined to articulate the roles, responsibilities, and qualifications needed for presidential assistant positions at colleges and universities.

Study Limitations

This section describes the limitations of this study that might have influenced the results and findings. First, the electronic survey was administered in the spring 2018 when most public colleges and universities were on spring recess, and the survey timeline had to be extended to increase the sample size. If the study had been conducted prior to spring recess, possibly more participants could have been included in this study.

Second, the study examined only a targeted population, presidential assistants at a large state higher education system located in the Northeastern United States. The collection of data from a wider range of colleges and universities, including privately owned colleges and universities, Christian colleges and universities, and other public educational systems in the Northeastern United States, as well as gathering data from the NAPAHE, which has a greater numbers of presidential assistants, would increase the knowledge about this profession because of the different job descriptions of presidential assistants in different educational systems.

Third, the presidential assistants' e-mail addresses were obtained from the public college and university websites. Some websites were not up to date, and using an official higher education online directory database, such as the Higher Education Publication, Inc., would have assisted in obtaining accurate contact information on presidential assistants. The ability to access an official higher education directory was not available to the researcher at the time of this study.

Research Recommendations

The findings from this study, along with the review of the literature, suggest several recommendations for future research, professional practice, and leaders in institutions of higher education. The hope is that future researchers will expand on the findings of this study to further validate the managerial functions and leadership practices of presidential assistants in college and institutions of higher education.

Research methodology. In this study, a quantitative research design examined the managerial functions and leadership practices of presidential assistants using Kouzes and Posner's (2012) LPI to examine the leadership practices of presidential assistants; however, including the LPI 360-degree assessment would gain additional perspectives on presidential assistants' roles. Another recommendation related to research design would be to open up the survey to presidential assistants at other public or private institutions in the Northeastern United States to compare the managerial functions and leadership practices between other higher education institutions. For example, a comparison study between presidential assistants at state institutions could yield information about how presidential assistants roles are system specific.

Future studies could utilize both quantitative and qualitative research approaches that could reveal more in-depth information about individual participants. As an example, open-ended surveys for presidential assistants could be conducted to reveal the beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of individuals. The results of qualitative studies could inform the lived experience of individuals' leadership practices and managerial functions because face-to-face interviews would gain a better understanding about presidential assistants

(Creswell, 2014). The ability to compare both quantitative and qualitative studies would further enhance the information obtained from presidential assistants.

Presidential assistants. The current study examined a variety of presidential assistants with the titles of administrative assistant to the president, assistant to the president; associate to the president, chief of staff; executive assistant to the president, executive associate to the president; and special assistant to the president. Given the variations of titles, roles, and responsibilities of presidential assistants, future studies could focus on one type of presidential assistant, such as chiefs of staff, because this position is defined as nonsecretarial, and to show the level of administrative flexibility of this position. An increase of job announcements for chief of staff positions in higher education publications could mean that the position of presidential assistants are being reimagined.

Recommendations for Practice

Professional development. Educational training and development should be provided to presidential assistants by employing institutions, and they should have an intentional focus on building leadership capacity. Leadership skills could include critical thinking, collaboration, and relationship and team building to influence others through organizational and cultural changes in higher education.

National Association for Presidential Assistants in Higher Education. This study could assist the NAPAHE, a national professional organization for presidential assistants, in developing topics for its leadership conference. As the roles and responsibilities of presidential assistants have evolved, NAPAHE could be helpful to assist this growing population in the field of higher education through these conferences

(Curchack, 2009). The mission of the association is to build a network for presidential assistants to learn new ideas and best practices from their peers to provide them with professional development seminars, conferences, workshops, and meetings (Curchack, 2009; NAPAHE, 2016).

Current or future presidents. College and university presidents should consider the leadership role of presidential assistants on college campuses and determine whether presidential assistants serve as secretarial support, managers, or leaders and broadly communicate their role on campus (Waters & Hightowers, 2016). In this study, some presidential assistants indicated that they served on the president's executive team, but the findings did not reveal in what capacity. Senior leaders should ensure that the college community understands the roles and responsibilities, and to eliminate the ambiguity, of this position and ensure that the institution and its members understand and accept the role of the presidential assistant. Senior leaders should also work with presidential assistants to enhance appropriate leadership skills. In addition, college and university presidents should consider how best to balance day-to-day managerial functions with broader leadership responsibilities.

Hiring practices. This study could be very insightful to hiring managers in the selection, recruitment, and retention of presidential assistants in higher education. Future or current presidential assistants may be selected for positions based on their leadership training and development, which may assist higher education institutions in supporting the mission and values of those higher education institutions. The role of presidential assistants differs within the same higher education system, and it may be important for

the human resources department to assess the position and develop job descriptions that mirror the functions being performed by presidential assistants (Nguyen, 2013).

Leadership. In this study, presidential assistants scored low in the leadership practice of inspiring a shared vision. The college and university presidents who supervise presidential assistants should review, define, and communicate the role of presidential assistants' leadership role on campuses. The presidential assistant has the potential to provide unique insights and creative solutions when they are given opportunities to participate in the decision-making process.

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that presidential assistants at a large state higher education system in the Northeastern United States used Kouzes and Posner's (2012) five practices of exemplary leadership; however, some were not involved in the decision-making processes and scored low in the leadership practice of inspiring a shared vision. Presidential assistants who had more experience in the position and were older in age were more apt to model the way and were good resources to coach and mentor new or current staff. The role of presidential assistants is a vital position in a rapidly changing environment where higher education is facing complex issues and changing to address those issues. Presidential assistants are middle managers who frequently handle several managerial functions and collaborate with internal constituents (i.e., faculty, staff, and students) to meet strategic goals and objectives, allowing college and university presidents to focus on the mission and vision of those colleges and universities.

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Appendix A

Cover Letter to Presidential Assistants

Dear Presidential Assistant,

My name is Sheila M. Strong, and I am a presidential assistant and doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership Program in the School of Education at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. I am pleased and honored to invite you to participate in a study of how presidential assistants utilize leadership practices and perform managerial functions in the offices of presidents at colleges and universities. The intended outcome of this research is to increase the knowledge and understanding about the critical role of presidential assistants in higher education in the Northeastern United States.

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to do the following: Complete the online consent form to participate and then complete online survey to identify your leadership practices and managerial functions that you most frequently use in your daily interactions as a presidential assistant on your campus. The survey is anonymous and will take approximately 10-15 minutes for you to complete and request that you take the survey in one sitting.

To take this survey, please click here to review the consent form and begin the survey. I appreciate your completing the survey by the deadline of _____.

If you have questions about the study, please contact me at (____) _____ or _____@sjfc.edu. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

Sheila M. Strong
Research Investigator
St. John Fisher College
(____) _____
_____@sjfc.edu

Appendix B

St. John Fisher College Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Exploring Kouzes & Posner's Exemplary Leadership Practices of Presidential Assistants in Higher Education

Name of researcher: Sheila M. Strong Phone: (____) _____

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Shannon Cleverley-Thompson Phone: (____) _____

Committee Member: Dr. Ruth Harris Phone: (____) _____

Purpose of study: To examine the frequency in which presidential assistants engage in Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership and the managerial functions used to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives in colleges and universities in the Northeastern United States.

Place of study: Online

Length of participation: 10-15 minutes

Method of data collection: A quantitative research approach will be utilized to gain information about the leadership practices, managerial functions, and demographic and professional characteristics of presidential assistants in higher education. The instrument will be an electronic web-based survey made up of 41 questions and includes three sections, the Leadership Practices Inventory Self-Assessment, demographics characteristics, and managerial functions.

Risks and benefits: There are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any online related activity the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. To the best of my ability your answers in this study will remain confidential. To minimize any risks, I will remove e-mail addresses, names, IP addresses, institution names, or other personally identifiable information from the data set. I will remove any personal reference a participant makes which identifies themselves or their institution in their comments to the open-ended questions. I hope that your participation in the study may provide new information on the leadership behaviors and managerial functions of presidential assistants in higher education in Northeastern United States.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of subjects: The personal information obtained from the presidential assistants in higher education in the Northeastern United States, will be anonymized and kept confidential by storing the files on a password protected external hard drive in locked offices of the investigator for 3 years.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of data collected: All online data provided by presidential assistants in higher education in the Northeastern United States will be kept confidential and secured on a password-protected computer in a file that requires a login with a username and password, during the timespan of the proposed study, and all data will remain this way for 3 years after the publication of the proposed study. The researcher will be the only person who has access to the online data collected from presidential assistants. All data will be destroyed by the researcher 3 years after the publication of the proposed study. Your information may be shared with appropriate governmental authorities ONLY if you or someone else is in danger, or if we are required to do so by law.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Participant

Signature

Date

Investigator Name

Signature

Date

Appendix C

Reminder Invitation to Presidential Assistants

Dear Presidential Assistant,

I recently sent you an e-mail to ask for your participation in my dissertation research concerning presidential assistants in higher education in the Northeastern United States to identify your leadership practices and managerial functions that you most frequently use in your daily interactions as a presidential assistant on your campus. If you have not yet had an opportunity to complete the survey, I hope you will do so. The survey takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Your responses will be voluntary and meet strict standards of confidentiality concerning the participant's name, e-mail address, and institution affiliation. Please be assured that responses will only be reported in the aggregate with those of other participants. Interested participants will be provided a copy of the final study results upon written request.

To take this survey, please click [here](#) to review the consent form and begin the survey. I appreciate your completing the survey by _____.

Sincerely,

Sheila M. Strong
Research Investigator
St. John Fisher College
(____) _____
_____@sjfc.edu

Appendix D

Final Reminder to Presidential Assistants

Dear Presidential Assistant,

This is a friendly reminder to let you know that the deadline is quickly approaching to participate in my dissertation research entitled Exploring Kouzes and Posner's Exemplary Practices of Presidential Assistants in Higher Education. If you have not completed the survey, I hope you will do so _____. The findings from this study will be used to advance knowledge of the profession and to help presidential assistants better understand their use of leadership practices.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please click here to review the consent form and begin the survey and complete by _____. I am happy to answer any questions you may have to assist in your decision to participate in this study. Please feel free to contact me at the telephone number or e-mail address listed below.

Sincerely,

Sheila M. Strong
Research Investigator
St. John Fisher College
(____) _____
_____@sjfc.edu

Appendix E

Presidential Assistants in Higher Education Survey

Web-Based Survey	Questions	Type of Scale	Purpose
Section 1 Leadership Practices Inventory Self-Assessment Designed by Kouzes and Posner	1-30	Likert Scale 1 = Almost never and 10= Almost always	To exam the frequency in which presidential assistants engage in Kouzes and Posner's Five Leadership Practices of Exemplary Leadership
Section 2 Demographic and Professional Characteristics Information Designed by Researcher	31-39	Self-identified	To identify the make-up of presidential assistants participating in the survey
What is your current position title? What is your highest educational level? What degrees does your university offer? How many years have you worked in this position? What is your gender identity? Do you identify as Hispanic/Latino? How do you identify your race? What is your age?			
Section 3 Managerial Roles and Responsibilities Designed by Researcher	39-41	Likert Scale Never A few times a year Monthly Weekly Daily	To identify the managerial functions of presidential assistants participating in the survey
How often do you draft and coordinate college-wide communication on behalf of the president? How often do you serve as the liaison between the president and cabinet members, administrators, faculty, staff or students? How often do you manage the president's calendar for events and meetings? How often do you serve as the president's representative on internal committees? How often do you serve as the president's representative on external committees? How often do you serve as the liaison to the institution's board of trustees? How often do you provide insight to the president about initiatives that may have unfavorable consequences to the institution? How often do you collaborate with others to solve problems? How often do you work with faculty, staff, and students in planning or implementing the strategic plan?			

Note. Section 1 adapted from "The Leadership Practices Inventory: Theory and evidence behind the five practices of exemplary leaders" by J. M. Kouzes and, 2002. Retrieved from http://media.wiley.com/assests/463/74/lc_jb_appendix.pdf

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