

Administrative Work in Higher and Postsecondary Education: A Critical Review of Empirical Research

Kimberly Kile and Jerlando F. L. Jackson
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Researchers have long acknowledged the complexity of performing administrative work² in American organizations (e.g., Burns, 1954; Carlson, 1951; Dublin & Spray, 1964; Fayol, 1949). They have examined important questions surrounding administrative work in various sectors: business (e.g., Luthans, Hodgetts, & Rosenkrantz, 1988; Mintzberg, 1983); government (e.g., Shafritz, Riccucci, Rosenbloom, & Hyde, 1992; Starling, 1998); not-for-profit (e.g., Myers & Sacks, 2003); hospital (e.g., Pfeffer & Salencik, 1977); and education (e.g., Bright & Richards, 2001; Peterson, 1998). Within colleges and universities, the challenging and complex process of administrative work has been well studied (e.g., Dill, 1984; Moore, 1983). Emerging from this research is an understanding of the central role that administrators play in the strategic operations of colleges and universities (Bess, 2003; Birnbaum, 1988). More specifically, this research has situated administrators as the core group responsible for guiding their respective institution through contemporary challenges. In the past 15 years, a body of literature has emerged that has focused on administrators as a unit of analysis (e.g., Bensimon, 1991; Carroll, James, Gmelch, 1994; Jackson & Kile, 2004; Lindsay, 1999). Studies arising from these research-based articles are the primary focus of this research review.

To frame the contribution and rationale for this review, the contemporary context of administrative work in higher and postsecondary education³ suggests that college and university leaders must address two major challenges: (a) enhancing institutional effectiveness; and (b) deepening student engagement. Once the importance of this investigation is established, previous research is examined. The examination provided a historical perspective and contemporary views. Next, the method section details the search procedures and analyses. The findings section provides a critical analysis of the research studies contained within this review. Finally, the manuscript concludes with implications for practice and future research.

Contemporary Challenges for Administrative Work in Higher and Postsecondary Education

Empirically and practically there are at least two significant challenges facing administrators at the contemporary American college and university. First, most applications of administrative science to the study of higher education administrators have focused on the connection of administrative work to institutional effectiveness (Del Favero, 2002; Heck,

² In the context of this study, administrative work refers to the daily tasks and responsibilities of higher and postsecondary administrators (e.g., planning, organizations, and directing).

³ Postsecondary education is any form of education that is taken after first attending a secondary school. Higher education is also education beyond the secondary level, but specifically education at the college level.

Johnsrud, & Rosser, 2000; Scoby, 1993). Moreover, in a recent study examining outcome-based results⁴ of administrative work in higher education, Jackson and Kile (2004) found that 60.3% of the 87 empirical research journal articles generated during the last decade that focused on administrators as a unit of analysis, linked their work to institutional related outcomes (e.g., financial planning). Thus, providing support that administrators are responsible for organizational productivity through the depiction of their day-to-day work patterns (Helgesen, 1990; Jackson & Peterson, 2004; Mintzberg, 1973). Accordingly, a large portion of the work-related roles of administrators is dedicated to establishing organizational frameworks and monitoring institutional effectiveness on a wide range of performance indicators (Baldrige National Quality Program, 2002).

Second, current institutional initiatives have focused on student learning, and in turn, what institutional responses should be in place to improve student engagement. Albeit researchers have established the important role of academic and social engagement by students in the learning process over the past 40 years (Astin, 1977; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), a resurgence of institutional focus has been prompted by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Kuh et al., 2001). NSSE annually collects student perception data directly from undergraduate students that colleges and universities can use to improve student learning. The College Student Report, NSSE's survey instrument, gathers data in five domains: (a) level of academic challenge; (b) student interaction with faculty members; (c) active and collaborative learning; (d) enriching educational experiences; and (e) supportive campus environment.

These five domains have been linked to previous research detailing desired outcomes in college. NSSE provides comparative benchmarks for determining how effectively colleges are contributing to learning in these areas for individual campuses, thus arming key decision-makers with data for improving their institutions. At the core of decision-makers leading efforts to improve student engagement are administrators who are central to garnering institutional support and resources to improve the conditions for student learning at their respective campuses. Accordingly, the aim of this analysis was to provide a systematic critique of empirical investigations on administrative work in higher and postsecondary education.

Previous Research on Administrative Work

In a pioneering article in the mid-1950s, Thompson (1956) acknowledged that administrative science was just beginning to be taken seriously. He asserted that the recognition of administration as an art form was beginning to be combined with the application of scientific methods for the study of administration, and the training of administrators (Thompson, 1956). Additionally, Litchfield (1956) credits the fields of mathematics, engineering, anthropology, and sociology with significant contributions to generating new knowledge related to the study of administration. However, he also notes that the examination of administration by these disciplines explored only selected aspects of administration. In other words, these disciplines did not examine the study of administration in its entirety, but rather through narrowly tailored inquiries (e.g., group dynamics, policy formulation, and decision making). Therefore, from the conception of the idea of administrative science, researchers have identified pieces (e.g., administrative decision making) of the "whole" for in-depth investigation (Litchfield, 1956).

⁴ In the context of this study, outcomes-based results refer to the impact, benefits, or changes to the educational environment and operational efficiency of institutions of higher and postsecondary education.

Historical Developments

The earliest accounts of research on the work of administrators in higher and postsecondary education can be traced back to the early 1900s (e.g., Hutchins, 1946; Uhrbrock, 1935). Uhrbrock (1935) criticized the daily operations of institutions of higher and postsecondary education. However, he also provided personal views on how administrators could perform their daily duties better. Hutchins (1946) discussed the qualities of a stellar administrator and sound administrative work. Later, Peterson (1974) engaged in a systematic review of literature pertaining to the organization and administration of higher and postsecondary education. Peterson was inspired by two articles (i.e., Henderson, 1963; McConnell, 1963) that exposed a deficiency in the research regarding American colleges and universities. Peterson found that while there had been advancements in knowledge since the two earlier studies (i.e., Henderson, 1963; McConnell, 1963) in the research on organization and administration in higher and postsecondary education, several significant gaps still existed.

In 1984, David Dill continued this research by synthesizing the advancements in research pertaining to administrators in higher and postsecondary education. Dill conducted a review of literature on administrative behavior in higher and postsecondary education. Dill found that “[t]he available research on higher education suggests that the use and allocation of time among academic administrators is not untypical of managers in general” (p. 105). However, due to their prior roles as professors, they tended to maintain significant “academic activities” (e.g., teaching, research, and publishing) and are less comfortable with the activities associated with full-time administrative work. Additionally, Dill discovered that much of this literature (e.g., Lewis & Dahl, 1976; Neumann & Boris, 1978; Peterson, 1975) in the 1970s addressed colleges and universities as organizations (e.g., organizational climate, governance structure, and processes of conflict). Apparently higher and postsecondary education researchers prior to the mid-1970s were either uninterested in or simply overlooked the work of administrators in higher and postsecondary education.

Hence, Dill (1984) decided to review literature published after Peterson’s work in an effort to determine whether subsequent research addressed Peterson’s particular concern with the lack of empirical studies addressing administrative actions and administrative behaviors. Dill found that many of the gaps in research on administrative behavior identified by Peterson had been addressed by 1984. The administrative behavior research reviewed by Dill included: (a) managerial time in academia; (b) human relations skills; (c) peer-related behavior; (d) conceptual skills; and (e) information-related behavior. Dill characterized the subsequent research as modest in quantity and limited in approach.

Contemporary Views

Contemporary views of administrative science research in higher and postsecondary education have moved from the historical approaches of simply examining “the general act” of administration, to examining the individual challenges of administrators in their positions (Gmelch, 2002; Toch, 2003). Administrators are often viewed as cogs in the bureaucratic wheel within the broader field of education (Birnbuam, 1988). However, more recently, administrators have been identified as institutional builders, academic, and civic leaders (Bornstein, 2002), cheerleaders and crisis counselors (Blankinship, 1994/1995), liaisons to off-campus agents or

external suppliers (Rosser, 2000), and economic developers (Brand, 2002). These more optimistic views may be due to the increasing interest and research related to administrative work in higher and postsecondary education.

Substantial diversity exists among jobs classified as administrative positions in higher and postsecondary education (see Table 1). Administrative positions can be differentiated by their functional specialization, skills, and training (Rosser, 2000). Further differentiation occurs when examining administrators' work environment: student services (Jackson, 2003); academic leadership (Jackson, 2004); and business and administrative services (Rosser, 2000). Some administrative positions (e.g., the academic deanship) are "the least studied and most misunderstood positions in the academy" (Gmelch, Wolverton, Wolverton, & Sarros, 1999, p. 717) and mid-level administrators who "[d]espite their significant numbers...they lack visibility...and have been of little concern to educational researchers" (Rosser, 2000, p. 5). In contrast, other positions like the college president are the focus of numerous articles and books. For example, at the time of this writing, a cursory ERIC search will yield approximately 1200 journal articles when the term "College Presidents" is used as a descriptor.

Table 1. Examples of Administrative Job Titles by Function

Student Affairs	Academic Affairs	Administrative Affairs
Greek Affairs Advisor	President	Vice President for Administration
Residence Hall Director	Provost	Vice President for Financial Affairs
Director of Multicultural Center	Associate Dean for Research	Director of Facilities Management
Director of Financial Aid	Business School Dean	Director of the Physical Plant
Registrar	Department Chair	Director of Public Safety

Guiding Framework

Two concepts were used to process and analyze data for this study: (a) institutional outcomes; and (b) student outcomes. Institutional outcomes provide a valuable framework to help assess and measure performance on a wide range of key performance indicators (Baldrige National Quality Program, 2002), while student outcomes examine the impact of colleges and universities on the academic and social development of students. The confluence of these two areas helps to crystallize the importance of administrative work in higher and postsecondary education.

The Baldrige model is salient because it does not ignore the fact that most of what may be found could be institutional in nature, and simultaneously maintains a degree of flexibility to accommodate the identification of studies focused on student outcomes. Briefly, the major core values and concepts of the Baldrige organizational framework are: (a) leadership; (b) strategic planning; (c) student, stakeholder, and market focus; (d) information and analysis; (e) faculty and staff focus; (f) process management; and (g) organizational performance results (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Baldrige Organizational Framework



Source: Baldrige National Quality Program (2002). *Educational criteria for performance excellence*. Milwaukee, WI: Author.

Leadership explores how senior leaders guide the organization, including how they review organizational performance. *Strategic planning* examines how organizations establish their strategic objectives and action plans. *Student, stakeholder, and market focus* is how organizations determine requirements, expectations, and preferences of students, stakeholders, and markets. *Information and analysis* examines the information management and performance measurement system and how the organization analyzes performance data and information. *Faculty and staff focus* looks at how organizations enable faculty and staff to develop their full potential. *Process management* examines the key aspects of organizations' process management (e.g., learning-focused education and student services). *Organization performance results* include the usual institutional outcome measures, but it also focuses on key student learning results.

Method

Search Procedures

To begin the review process of studies that focused on administrators as subjects (i.e., unit of analysis) in higher and postsecondary education, we conducted a computerized advanced literature search of the ERIC database. Three descriptors and keywords were searched in the

titles and abstracts of documents published between 1991 and 2001: (a) administrator(s); (b) higher education; and (c) postsecondary education. Additionally, the review was delimited to refereed journal articles⁵ published in the United States.

The search initially yielded 866 journal articles for consideration. Next full abstracts were printed and screened by the researchers using the required inclusion criteria (i.e., administrator focus, journal article, and 1991-2001). The abstracts that were deemed appropriate were identified, and the full articles were read for potential inclusion. One-hundred and eighty-two articles were read, and studies that did not meet the aforementioned standards for inclusion were removed. To ensure full inclusion of relevant journal articles, five experts who have published widely on administrative work were consulted for the next phase. During this phase, the panelists were sent the comprehensive list of journal articles and were asked to identify studies that may have been overlooked. Collectively, this search strategy resulted in a total of 78 useable journal articles for this analysis.

Analysis Procedures

The articles were classified in three stages using the taxonomies and classification schemes elaborated in an earlier study using these data (Jackson & Kile, 2004). First, we conducted preliminary sorting of these articles in three broad categories (i.e., academic affairs, student affairs, and administrative affairs)⁶. Next, we analyzed the research articles by substantive topic, purpose, scope, theoretical framework, and research design. In the evaluation of these articles, deliberate attempts were made to ascertain specific implications and outcomes of each journal article. In addition, special efforts were made to develop categorical domains for these articles, and synthesize any uniform weaknesses or criticisms for these journal articles. The analysis procedures were managed using traditional approaches for empirical reviews (Galvan, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Sample Description

Table 2 presents the results of the searches. There were 78 research articles used for this study, including recommendations from the panel of experts. The type of administrators studied varied by administrative focus. Approximately 42.3% examined administrators in academic affairs, 23.1% in student affairs, 16.7% in administrative affairs, and 17.9% used a mix of the three aforementioned areas. While 69.2% of these studies did not focus on any aspect of diversity⁷, the remaining 30.8% did. Of the 30.8% that focused on diversity, 17.9% examined gender related issues, 2.6% explored topics associated with race/ethnicity, and 10.3% focused on the intersection between gender and race/ethnicity. As it relates to methodological approach, 76.9% employed quantitative techniques, 20.5% used qualitative procedures, and 2.6% were mixed methods.

⁵ Non-refereed materials were excluded from this review for one main reason: (1) we wanted to delimit materials that had been peer-reviewed.

⁶ Academic affairs include positions such as president, academic deans, and vice president or provost of research. Student affairs include positions such as vice president for student affairs, dean of students, and director of financial aid. Administrative affairs encompass positions such as vice president for finance, director of alumni affairs, and director of computer services.

⁷ Studies that focused on gender or ethnic and racial diversity.

Table 2. Empirical Studies on Administrator Work from 1991 - 2001

Author(s)	Sector	Scope of the Study	Diversity	Method	Outcomes
Aaron & Georgia	2	National Random Sample N=257	N/A	1	2
Andrews & Licata	4	N=199	N/A	1	1
Ball	3	N=60	N/A	1	1
Banaszak-Holl & Greer	1	N=862	N/A	1	1
Banaszak-Holl & Greer	1	N=703	N/A	1	1
Belch & Strange	2	N=6	N/A	2	1
Bensimon	1	Longitudinal – 5 yrs N=15	N/A	2	1
Berwick	2	1 State N=240	N/A	1	3
Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski	2	Stratified Random Sample N=140	1	1	3
Blackhurst	2	Random Sample N=307	1	1	1
Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski	2	Random Sample N=140	1	1	1
Blackhurst	2	National Random Sample N=307	2	2	3
Blix & Lee	1	1 State N=575	N/A	1	3
Brown & Golbetti	2	N=57	2	1	1
Burns & Gmelch	1	Random Sample N=800	N/A	1	3
Cano & Ludwig	3	1 Institution N=127	N/A	1	1
Carroll & Gmelch	1	Random Sample N=800	N/A	1	3
Cooper & Dunlap	4	Purposeful Sample N=12	N/A	2	3
Cronin & Crawford	1	N=20	N/A	1	1
Cullen & Luna	4	2 States N=24	1	2	1
Deekle & Klerk	3	N=256	N/A	1	1
Dickman, Fugua,	4	Random Sample	N/A	1	3

Coombs, & Seals		N=205			
Donaldson & Kuhne	3	N=6	N/A	3	3
Dooley	3	1 Institution	N/A	2	1
Eitel	3	Random Sample N=285	N/A	1	1
Fairweather	1	N=904	N/A	1	1
Franklin	1	N=50	N/A	2	1
Glick	1	Random Sample N=253	N/A	1	3
Gmelch & Burns	1	National Random Sample N=564	N/A	1	3
Graber, Bellack, Musham, & O'Neil	1	N=100	N/A	1	1
Guido-DiBrito	2	N=54	N/A	2	1
Hardesty	3	N=39	N/A	2	1
Heck, Johnsrud, & Rosser	1	1 Institution N=235	N/A	1	1
Henry & Nixon	3	1 Institution N=29	N/A	1	1
Hickson, Stacks, & Amsbary	1	19 Journals	N/A	1	3
Hollis	3	N=86	3	1	1
Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter	2	N=344	N/A	1	3
Hubbard & Robinson	1	Random Sample N=370	1	1	3
Hurst & Peterson	1	N=3333	N/A	1	1
Johnsrud	4	1 Institution N=454	1	1	1
Johnsrud & Heck	4	1 Institution N=1108	1	1	1
Johnsrud & Rosser	4	1 State N=901	N/A	1	1
Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser	4	1 State N=869	N/A	1	1
Konrad & Pfeffer	4	Random Sample N=11,412	3	1	1
Krager & Brown	2	N=168	N/A	1	3
Lamborn	1	N=335	N/A	1	3
Lindsay	1	N=4	3	2	3
Marcus	2	1 Institution	N/A	2	1

		N=21			
McGown, Eichelberger, & Nelson	1	N=38	N/A	3	4
Mokuau & Hull	1	Stratified Random Sample N=85	N/A	1	1
Mondschein	1	1 Institution N=6	1	2	3
Munn	2	N=169	N/A	1	1
Munson	1	N=53	N/A	1	1
Newman	2	1 State N=176	N/A	1	3
Palestini	1	Random Sample N=114	N/A	1	3
Pastore & Meacci	3	N=136	1	1	1
Peyronel	3	1 State N=26	N/A	1	1
Piper & Rodger	2	N=56	N/A	1	3
Ramey	4	1 State N=80	3	1	3
Rank & Hutchinson	1	Random Sample N=150	N/A	2	3
Regan	3	N=8	N/A	2	3
Robinson, Butler, & Glennen	2	N=152	N/A	1	1
Sagaria & Johnsrud	4	1 Institution N=350	N/A	1	1
Scoby	3	N=111/118	N/A	1	1
Scott	2	Random Sample N=100	N/A	1	3
Smith	1	Random Sample N=172	N/A	1	1
Smolen	1	N=271	N/A	1	1
Stover	4	2 Institutions N=99	1	1	1
Street & Kimmel	2	N=321	N/A	1	3
Travis, Higgs, & Mathews	1	N=275	N/A	1	1
Twombly & Moore	1	Stratified Random Sample N=4408	N/A	1	1
Vozzola, Hatfield, & Hatfield	1	N=9	N/A	2	1

Warner	1	N=6	3	2	1
Watts & Wernsman		N=510	N/A	1	2
Wessel & Keim	1	Stratified Random Sample N=270	N/A	1	3
Townsend & Wiese	2	Random Sample N=695	N/A	1	3
Wolverton, Wolverton, & Gmelch	1	National Sample N=1370	N/A	1	3
Woodard, Hayman, von Destinon, & Jamison	2	N=821	N/A	1	2

Key: Sector: 1=academic affairs; 2=student affairs; 3=administrative affairs; and 4=mixed
Diversity: 0=none; 1=gender; 2=race/ethnic; and 3=combination
Method: 1=quantitative; 2=qualitative; and 3=mixed methods
Outcomes: 1=institutional outcomes; 2=student outcomes; and 3=personal outcomes

The scope of these studies varied greatly. Approximately 14.1% were single-institution studies, 7.7% were studies of state higher education systems, 25.6% were random non-national samples, 16.7% employed purposeful sampling, 32.1% were national random samples, and 3.8% used national datasets for secondary analyses. Of the studies used for this analysis, 52.6% were not guided by a framework, while 47.4% did use a framework (e.g., Biglan’s dichotomies) to guide data analysis. When examining the espoused purpose for these studies, the documents reviewed were placed into six categories that were aligned with the Baldrige model: (a) leadership – 28.2%; (b) strategic planning – 2.6%; (c) student, stakeholder, and market focus – 3.8%; (d) information and analysis – 11.5%; (e) faculty and staff focus – 37.2%; and (f) process management – 16.7%.

Limitations and Delimitations

The identification of limitations and delimitations for this study is particularly salient. First, identifying only articles that used administrators as a unit of analysis delimited this study. Perhaps additional studies have made the connection between the student outcomes and the work of administrators, but do not use administrators as the unit of analysis. Thus, they would not be included in this study. Second, the search procedures for this study were conducted using ERIC. Thus, the articles are limited to those listed in the ERIC database. We tried to include all relevant articles by consulting with five subject matter experts. As stated earlier, the widely published scholars were sent a comprehensive listing of all articles that were to be included in this investigation. The experts were then asked to identify any articles that should be considered for inclusion. Still, the study is limited by the search procedures employed and the knowledge of the subject matter experts.

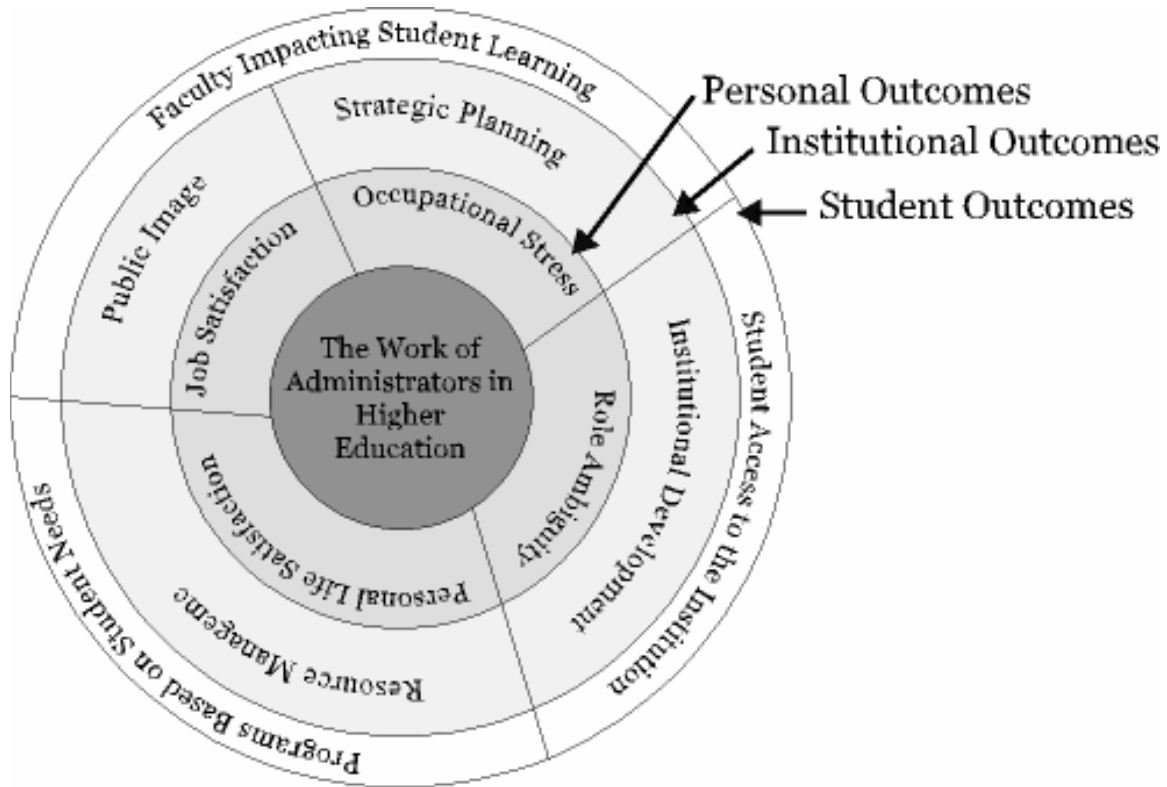
Third, only peer-reviewed journal articles were included. It was the researchers desire to delimit the included articles to only refereed articles. While, we believe that excellent research can be found in non-refereed journals, it was decided not to make that type of judgment on the

articles included in this study. Delimiting the included literature to peer-reviewed articles leaves the assessment of quality to discipline specific scholars. Finally, the study delimited the articles included in this study to those published in the United States. This delimiting factor was chosen to sharply focus this investigation on the higher and postsecondary educational system of one country. The researchers wanted to minimize the ambiguity and confounding factors that can be introduced to an investigation by cultural influences and factors.

Findings - Categorizing Administrative Work Studies

Findings based on the review of the literature revealed three outcomes from administrative work: (a) institutional outcomes; (b) personal outcomes; and (c) student outcomes. An outcomes-based model was developed for administrative work in higher and postsecondary education based on a preliminary review of the literature (Jackson & Kile, 2004) (see Figure 2). Located in the center of the model is the administrator and his or her work. Surrounding the administrator are three spheres representing the three major themes that emerged from the literature: (a) personal outcomes; (b) institutional outcomes; and (c) student outcomes. The spheres are in order from the most tangible to the least tangible (i.e., from the center out), from the administrator's perspective. In other words, the model illustrates the relationship between administrative work and major outcomes.

Figure 2. Outcomes-Based Model for the Work of Administrators in Higher Education



Source: Jackson, J. F. L., & Kile, K. S. (2004). Does a nexus exist between the work of administrators and student outcomes in higher education?: An answer from a systematic review of research. *Innovative higher education*, 28(4), 285-301.

For example, an administrator readily sees personal outcomes from the work that he or she does. Further, an administrator is more likely to see institutional outcomes before student outcomes. The spheres of the model were deliberately made different widths to correspond with the amount of literature found on a particular outcome. Most of the literature focused on personal outcomes for administrators, followed by institutional outcomes. The literature linking administrative work directly to student outcomes was scarce. The first two (institutional and personal outcomes) consume the bulk of the literature, which overwhelmingly focused on the role and duties for the person in the administrative position. However, a small but increasing number of studies were identified that examined student outcomes as an emerging focus for administrative work.

Institutional Outcomes

Institutional outcomes were the most prevalent topic within the literature reviewed. We speculate that the interest in institutional outcomes stems from its universal applicability.

Institutional outcomes are of interest to several stakeholders within the higher and postsecondary education arena (Birnbaum, 1988). In other words, while personal outcomes of administrative work in higher and postsecondary education may be of particular interest to administrators working within those settings, institutional outcomes would likely be of interest to a larger audience (e.g., administrators, faculty, and boards of trustees).

The articles categorized as institutional outcomes produced findings that related to more than the individual administrator. The institutional outcomes studies explore the influence of intra-institutional relationships, organizational structure, morale, and diversity and equity issues. Intra-institutional relationships are important to foster efficient institutional functioning. Institutional collaboration is imperative to institutional effectiveness (Hardesty, 1991), and administrators should aggressively pursue collaborative opportunities (Munn, 1998). Organizational structure can impact administrators' desire, or lack thereof, to stay in a position. In other words, the structure of an institution can significantly contribute to the length-of-stay of an administrator. While longer administrative tenures lead to consistency and stability in organizational functioning, shorter tenures represent organizational problems (Banaszak-Holl & Creer, 1994). Loyalty to an institution, or office, may encourage longer tenures as well. However, Guido-Dibrito (1995) found that organizational structure may affect the extent to which loyalty can be fostered. Morale also influences an administrator's desire to stay or leave an institution (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000).

Employee satisfaction affects morale and Blackhurst, Brandt, and Kalinowski (1998) found that women in lower-level administrative positions are particularly dissatisfied with their work settings. However, morale is largely based upon individual perceptions and requires institutional sensitivity to address it (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999; Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000). Diversity and equity issues can also impact organizational loyalty and institutional morale. Sagaria and Johnsrud (1992) identified that the administrative structure is shaped like a low pyramid with few jobs at the top. They found that White men are over-represented in upper-level administrative positions, and White women and people of color are over-represented in lower-level administrative positions. Twombly and Moore (1991) concurred stating that a "glass ceiling" exists for women in top administrative positions. Specific targeted programs are one way to address inequities and to manage diversity issues (Cano & Ludwig, 1995). Henry and Nixon (1994) suggested creating mentoring programs to help improve campus climate.

Personal Outcomes

Personal outcomes were the next most prevalent topic within the literature related to administrators in higher and postsecondary education. The interest in personal outcomes is crucial in a highly stressful work environment such as colleges and universities (Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Gmelch & Seedorf, 1989). Often a research question will be brought to light because the researcher observes or encounters an issue or problem. Administrators in higher and postsecondary education are in an academic environment that naturally encourages individuals to ask and answer research questions. Thus, an administrator may research "personal" questions or seek out someone to "find the answer" for him or her.

The articles categorized as personal outcomes focus on issues that directly impact the administrator. These articles answer questions related to administrators' daily activities, career development, stress and burnout, and role conflict and ambiguity. Several articles discussed issues that occur in administrators' daily work. For example, administrative decision-making

(Krager & Brown, 1992), use of theory (Piper & Rodger, 1992), differences in work environment (Volkwein & Parmley, 2000), leadership style (Palestini, 1999), administrators' use of journaling (Cooper & Dunlap, 1991), and dealing with the politics at work (Newman, 1991) emerged as daily challenges for administrators. The career development issues that surfaced were primarily related to the use of mentors (Ramey, 1995) for position attainment, (Hubbard & Robinson, 1998) continuous administrator education training (Lamborn, 1991), and reducing administrator turnover (Blackhurst, 2000). The use of mentoring to reduce turnover is particularly noteworthy because Blackhurst, Brandt, and Kalinowski (1998) found that increased years of experience appear to be associated with reduced levels of ambiguity.

Role conflict and ambiguity are common challenges for administrators. Further, role conflict and ambiguity can negatively impact administrators in educational institutions. Learning to balance personal and professional lives is a way to combat the negative effects of role conflict and ambiguity (Wolverton, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999). Other issues related to personal career development that emerged were: the value of a higher education doctorate for administrative positions (Townsend & Wiese, 1992), pathways to the presidency (Wessel & Keim, 1994), and encouragement to publish early in one's career (Hickson, Stacks, & Amsbary, 1992). Burnout and stress are pervasive issues in higher and postsecondary education administration. Researchers have tried to define factors that can lead to increased levels of stress for administrators (Berwick, 1992). Additionally, they have explored stress due to role conflict and ambiguity (Burns & Gmelch, 1995), the "fit" between an administrator's style and job demands (Bliz & Lee, 1991), gender differences in reported levels of stress (Scott, 1992), and burnout (Howard-Hamilton, Palmer, Johnson, & Kicklighter, 1998).

Student Outcomes

Literature linking administrator roles and duties to student outcomes was conspicuously lacking from the scholarly work reviewed for this particular study. Most of the literature regarding student outcomes has focused on the relationship between the student and organizational behavior (Berger & Milem, 1998). Therefore, there is a gap in the literature exploring the connection between education administrators and student outcomes. Recently, this gap has been identified (Jackson & Kile, 2004) and conceptual frameworks are being developed (Del Favero, 2002) to explore the relationship between administrative behavior and student outcomes.

The articles categorized as student outcomes for this particular study focus on the relationship between the administrator and the students. The articles included in the student outcomes category include: the need for policies that impact students (Aaron & Georgia, 1994), student and administrator interactions (Watts & Wernsman, 1997), and assessing student outcomes (Woodard, Hayman von Destinon, & Jamison, 1991).

Criticisms

We take this space to highlight some shortcomings that caused us some concern during our review of this literature. More importantly, it is the aim of this critique to strengthen future studies in this area of research. We do not pretend to be experts in each and every area of literature related to administrative work in higher and postsecondary education. Therefore, we will not offer suggestions for improvements in that regard. We will assume that the authors of

the articles we reviewed have done appropriate literature reviews. However, the use, or lack thereof, of theoretical frameworks and methodology (which tends to be less discipline/content specific) will be reviewed. Additionally, we will discuss data analysis methods, sample size, and limitations. Likewise, our intent is not to single out individual studies, but rather discuss them as a group.

Theoretical Perspective

Theoretical frameworks are the “lighthouses” and “roadmaps” for academic inquiry; they enable the reader to understand which assumptions and existing knowledge base is guiding the researcher’s quest for new insights on the problem being examined. In contrast, a research study with no theoretical framework has not identified the structure for examining the identified question under investigation. Surprisingly, 52.6% of the articles reviewed for this study lacked explicit theoretical frameworks. Only a few authors actually identified a theoretical framework for the investigation. Most studies that fell into this category did not make an attempt to advance a model, theory, or concept, but rather simply reported findings. Such an oversight is problematic and weakens the development of the field. The lack of guiding frameworks leave consumers of the research with questions (e.g., theoretical underpinnings of the study), including what constructs, concepts, and assumptions were directing the investigation.

Methodological Approach

Generally, research results are more interesting if they are significant and if they are generalizable beyond the sample. First, approximately 18% of the studies reported insignificant findings and dedicated discussion space to these results. In doing so, authors, for the most part, provided a rationale for the importance of non-significant findings, while the remainder did not. Second, the data sets used in these studies can be characterized as single institutional data and having small sample sizes. These studies, for the most part, were exploratory or were in the early stages of examining administrative work and constructing new theoretical approaches in higher and postsecondary education. Third, approximately 22% of these articles presented implications and discussion items that went beyond data used for the study. While in other cases, some authors claimed that their sample was representative of the population, but provided no population-based or institution-wide demographic evidence. In these cases, authors could have simply provided supportive data for these statements. Finally, many of the studies were descriptive in nature. While descriptive studies are useful and make contributions to knowledge, we were left wondering why so many studies were descriptive rather than evaluative or discovery-oriented. While the lack of data on the nature of administrative work and the methodological design complexities could both be reasons for these occurrences, it was unclear as to why the literature is largely descriptive studies.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative research can be difficult to describe in easily replicable steps and is often perceived as vague. In the context of this manuscript, many of the qualitative studies included within this review of literature used interviews (49%), but neglected to provide interview questions or short excerpts of the transcripts. Thus, the reader is unable to evaluate the soundness

of the protocol and can only rely on the author(s) interpretations. Equally problematic, quantitative research designs can be overly cryptic. Approximately 29% of the articles included in this review neglected to include key information about the variables, data collection instruments, and in some cases a clear description of data analysis. We acknowledge that publishing in peer-reviewed journals has several constraints such as limited space per journal issue which could lead to not including important information. Unfortunately, an abbreviated methodology section leaves the reader with significant questions about the quality of the results.

Sample Size

Researchers and consumers of research often debate the selection of sample size. The debate revolves around the delicate balance between choosing a sample that is representative of the population of interest and consideration of limited resources (e.g., time, money, and access to subjects). Ten percent of the articles reviewed had limited samples. A group of articles were based on data collected from six or less subjects (e.g., Belch & Strange, 1995; Lindsay, 1999). Still some studies had many more people involved but were limited to a single institution (Henry & Nixon, 1994; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1992). While using a case study methodology is a compelling rationale for limiting a study to a single institution, it still presents limitations in generalizability. In several cases, the studies of administrative work at particular institutions focused on phenomena or issues that were being implemented or advanced (e.g., Cano & Ludwig, 1995; Heck, Johnsrud, & Rosser, 2000; Henry & Nixon, 1994; Marcus, 2000). Similarly, some studies limited the research to a particular state system (Blix & Lee, 1991; Peyronel, 2000).

Limitations

Finally, a significant portion of the studies included in this review were remiss in neglecting to include the limitations of the study. For example, limited resources are valid reasons for delimiting the number of participants and/or sample sizes. Noting this limitation could reduce the debate surrounding sample size selection. Not identifying the limitations of a study leaves the work open to criticisms. Therefore, the authors should specify the limitations of the study. Further, when limitations are specified it places boundaries on the assertions of the research. Thus, consumers of the literature will know the limits of the statements. Then, it will be apparent that the assertions made in the study are not “blanket” statements intended to be universally applicable, but applicable in specific situations that could help inform/predict results in similar situations.

Implications for Understanding Administrative Work

While it is generally understood that administrators within the student affairs and administrative affairs received graduate-level training to perform their prescribed duties (Komives & Taub, 2000), it is not uncommon for academic leaders to have little or no formal preparation as administrators (Jackson, 2004). Academic leaders, who are sometimes referred to in the literature as “amateur administrators” (Tucker & Bryan, 1991), receive most of their experience serving on and chairing committees - an experiential learning model. Their conceptions of good administrative practices are shaped by the examples afforded to them at the

departmental, college, and university-level. While this historical approach has been applied since the inception of higher and postsecondary education in the United States, contemporary administrative work demands more from the individual.

The empirical research on administrative work in higher and postsecondary education provides one avenue to gain a greater understanding of the development of good practices that impact three main areas: (a) personal outcomes; (b) institutional outcomes; and (c) student outcomes. From the studies reviewed herein, it is apparent that the work of college and university administrators is complex. The challenging aspects of administrative work impact and influence in many ways (e.g., time management, role conflict/ambiguity, and personal-professional time allocation) the individuals who assume administrative positions.

Financial responsibility, institutional direction, effective external relations, and resource development are all important topics that emerge within the work cycle for college and university administrators, and each appears related to the institution's outcomes. Accordingly, whether administrators appropriately negotiate their personal outcomes or not, the evaluation of their performance in the job will be based on their ability to achieve outcomes identified at the institutional level. The reviewed research, withstanding the aforementioned limitations, could provide excellent benchmark practices as well as research to help improve administrative practice.

As demonstrated in the review of the literature, very little research attempted to make connections between administrative input (e.g. roles, actions, and resources invested) and student outcomes. This review reinforces the need for research that makes explicit the connections that exist between administrative work and student outcomes. More importantly, it highlights the notion that administrative work impacts not only personal and institutional outcomes, but student outcomes as well. The research is a reminder for administrators that may not have direct contact with students that the results of their work will directly or indirectly impact student outcomes. In summary, the reviewed literature bodes well for informing the practice of administrative work in higher and postsecondary education.

Implications for Future Research

A comprehensive review of research on administrative work in higher and postsecondary education confirms that there is understanding among researchers and practitioners that college and university administration is a complex activity that impacts various institutional, personal, and student outcomes. Future research must provide more attention to benefits of administrative work to the broader community (institution and beyond). In particular, this research should provide additional inquiries that bridge the knowledge gap between administrator inputs and student outcomes.

Our discussion of the studies included in this critical review serve to emphasize the importance of the outcomes associated with administrative work in higher and postsecondary education. Moreover, we uncovered particular synergies between the interaction of administrators and various outcomes (i.e., personal, institutional, and student) in higher and postsecondary education. We argue that research on administrative work could benefit from closer attention to its connection to student outcomes. In addition, there is a need for further research to re-examine the identified outcomes, and to examine the interaction among these forms of outcomes. There are a number of related research questions that deserve examination:

- How do administrators' conceptions of good practice inform their targeted outcomes?
- How do administrators' conceptions of good practice change over time?
- To what degree are administrators aware of who or what is benefited by their work?
- Are certain kinds of targeted outcomes prioritized at specific administrative levels?

These research questions hold potential for developing a clearer understanding of administrative work in higher and postsecondary education, which in turn has implications for advancing our knowledge about linkages to outcomes, but also to improve practice.

Conclusion

The research studies we have reviewed have contributed to a growing body of literature that examines administrative work in higher and postsecondary education. Further, this review was guided by an outcomes model approach. However, we remain unconvinced that the research has been conceived in such a way that it highlights the benefits of administrative work in higher and postsecondary education in a compelling manner. Of particular concern is the relationship between administrative work and student outcomes, which appears to have not been sufficiently problematized.

Nonetheless, what is clear is that further research is needed to make explicit the benefits of administrative work in higher and postsecondary education. The growth in the body of research would add to the richness of previous research, as well as strengthen administrative practice. As mentioned previously, one promising area that warrants further research is the nexus between administrative work in higher and postsecondary education and student outcomes. Previous research (e.g., Del Favero, 2002; Jackson & Kile, 2004) highlights the need to frame outcomes-based oriented inquiries into the work of administrators in higher and postsecondary education. In addition, we advocate that more detail be placed on the guiding frameworks, sample sizes, and data analyses to enhance the rigor of the findings. In closing, the consistently growing body of empirical research on administrative work in higher and postsecondary education is well positioned to inform future administrative and research practice.

References

- Bensimon, E. M. (1991). How college presidents use their administrative groups: "Real" and "illusory" teams. *Journal of Higher Education Management*, 7(1), 35-51.
- Blankinship, D. A. (1994/1995). Personality priorities, stress management, and the research administrator. *SRA Journal*, 26(3, 4), 29-35.
- Birnbaum, R. (1988). *How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organizations and leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bornstein, R. (2002). Redefining presidential leadership in the 21st century. *The presidency*, 5(3), 16-19.
- Brand, M. (2002). The engaged president: Changing times, unchanging principles. *The Presidency*, 5(3), 26-30.
- Bright, D. F., & Richards, M. P. (2001). *The academic deanship: Individual careers and institutional roles*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Carroll, J. B., & Gmelch, W. H. (1994). Department chair's perceptions of the relative importance of their duties. *Journal of Higher Education Management*, 10(1), 49-63.
- Del Favero, M. (2002). Linking administrative behavior and student learning: The learning centered academic unit. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 77(3), 60-84.
- Dill, D. D. (1984). The nature of administrative behavior in higher education. *Educational Administrative Quarterly*, 20(3), 69-99.
- Gmelch, W. H. (Ed.). (2002). *Dean's balancing acts: Education leaders and the challenges they face*. Washington, DC: AACTE.
- Gmelch, W. H., & Burns, J. S. (1994). Sources of stress for academic department chairpersons. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 32(1), 79-94.
- Gmelch, W. H., & Seedorf, R. (1989). Academic leadership under siege: The ambiguity and imbalance of department chairs. *Journal of Higher Education Management*, 5, 37-44.
- Gmelch, W. H., Wolverton, M., Wolverton, M. L., & Sarros, J. C. (1999). The Academic Dean: An imperiled species searching for balance. *Research in Higher Education*, 40(6), 717-740.
- Heck, R. H., Johnsrud, L. K., & Rosser, V. J. (2000). Administrative effectiveness in higher education: Improving assessment procedures. *Research in Higher Education*, 41(6), 663-684.
- Helgesen, S. (1990). *The female advantage: Women's ways of leadership*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Henderson, A. (1963). Improving decision making through research. In G. K. Smith (Ed.), *Current issues in higher education*. Washington D.C.; American Association for Higher Education.
- Hutchins, R. M. (1946). The administrator. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 17(8), 395-407.
- Jackson, J. F. L. (2004). Toward a business model of executive behavior: An exploration of the workdays of four college of education deans at large research universities. *The Review of Higher Education*, 27(3), 409-427.
- Jackson, J. F. L., & Kile, K. S. (2004). Does a nexus exist between the work of administrators and student outcomes in higher education?: An answer from a systematic review of research. *Innovative higher education*, 28(4), 285-301.

- Komives, S. R., & Taub, D. J. (2000). Advancing professionally through doctoral education. In M. J. Barr, M. K. Desler, & Associates, *The handbook of student affairs administration* (2nd ed.) (pp. 508-534). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lewis, D. R., & Dahl, T. (1976). Time management in higher education administration: A case study. *Higher Education*, 5, 49-66.
- Lindsay, B. (1999). Women chief executives and their approaches towards equity in American universities. *Comparative Education*, 35(2), 187-199.
- Litchfield, E. H. (1956). Notes on a general theory of administration. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1(2), 3-29.
- Mintzberg, H. T. (1983). *Structure of fives: Designing effective organizations*. Englewood cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- McConnell, T. R. (1963). *Needed: Research in college and university organization and administration in the study of academic organizations*. Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education.
- Myers, J., & Sacks, R. (2003). Tools, techniques and tightropes: The art of walking and talking private sector management in non-profit organizations, is it just a question of balance? *Financial Accountability & Management*, 19(3), 287-305.
- Neumann, Y., & Boris, S. B. (1978). Paradigm development and leadership style of university department chairmen. *Research in Higher Education*, 8, 291-302.
- Peterson, M. W. (1974). Organization and administration in higher education: Sociological and social-psychological perspectives. *Review of Research in Education*, 2, 296-347.
- Peterson, W. O. (1975). Critical incidents for new and experienced college and university presidents. *Research in Higher Education*, 3, 45-50.
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1977). Organizational context and the characteristics and tenure of hospital administrators. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 20(1), 74-88.
- Rosser, V. J. (2000). Midlevel administrators: What we know. *New Directions in Higher Education*, 111, 5-13.
- Scoby, J. C. (1993). Financial conditions: An in-depth look at fiscal troubles on campus. *NACUBO Business Officer*, 27(5), 24-30.
- Shafritz, J. M., Riccucci, N. M., Rosenbloom, D. H., & Hyde, A. C. (1992). *Personnel management in government: Politics and process* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Marcel Dekker.
- Solomon, L. C., & Teirney, M. L., (1977). Determinants of job satisfaction among college administrators. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 48(4), 412-431.
- Thompson, J. D. (1956). On building an administrative science. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1(2), 102-111.
- Toch, T. (2003). *High schools on a human scale How small schools can transform American education*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Uhrbrock, R. S. (1935). Is college leadership bankrupt? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 6(1), 1-12.

You may contact the authors at:

Kimberly Kile - kpiasecki@wisc.edu

Jerlando F. L. Jackson – jjackson@education.wisc.edu