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Adejoke Kassim

*Kairos Educational Services*

Jim Zabloski

*Liberty University*

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**James Doti and the 25 Year Transformation of a West Coast University: A Case Study**

Adejoke Kassim and Jim Zabloski

**Abstract**

Research was conducted at Chapman University, Orange County, California, to explore the transformational leadership practices of Dr. James Doti, professor of Economics and president emeritus of Chapman University from 1991-2016, who led its transformation from a sleepy liberal arts college in Southern California to a mid-sized university of national stature. The theoretical framework for the study was the transformational leadership theory by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). This study investigated the president's demonstration of the four components of transformational leadership as identified by Bass: Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individual Consideration. Data collection was via interviews, document analysis, and observation of archival videos. James Doti personified transformational leadership. His compelling vision, personal charisma and financial acumen created the optimum atmosphere for the transformation that brought Chapman University out of obscurity, and into national prominence.

*Keywords:* College presidents; higher education institutions; leadership practices; leadership team; transformation; transformational leadership.

## **Background**

There is increased pressure to transform higher education institutions (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017) due to myriads of challenges facing the 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education leaders such as funding volatility, accountability, accessibility, closures, mergers, short presidential tenures and forecasted gap in talent (ACE, 2017; Bok, 2015; Mitchell, et al.). The coronavirus (COVID -19) global pandemic, however, presents the greatest challenge for the already-disrupted higher education sector, further highlighting the dire and urgent need for effective and transformational leadership in 21<sup>st</sup> century colleges (Lim, 2020; Ludorf, 2020). Burns (1978) described transformational leaders as those who cause change in systems and individuals. There is need for transformational college presidents who can successfully steer higher education institutions in the direction of positive change (Basham, 2012a, 2012b; Bourgeois, 2016). This single instrumental case study explored the transformational leadership practices of Dr. James L. Doti, president emeritus of Chapman University in California.

## **The Case**

James Doti is the president emeritus of Chapman University, having spearheaded its transformation from 1991-2016. He joined the liberal arts college in 1974 as a professor of Economics. After serving in several key leadership positions including as acting president twice, Doti became the president of Chapman University in 1991.

## **Chapman University**

Founded by Disciples of Christ in 1861, the liberal arts college became Chapman University in 1991. Prior to Doti's presidency, Chapman ranked 61<sup>st</sup> among 120 regional midsized Western universities according to the US News and World Report, while student

selectivity ranked 92<sup>nd</sup> on the same list. At the end of Doti's 25-year tenure, student selectivity moved to first or third place, Chapman ranked fifth among regional universities in the West, and second in 'Most Innovative Schools' (US News & World Report, 2017). Under Doti's leadership, Chapman launched six new schools including Law, Film, and Pharmacy. The student body grew from 2,000 to over 8,000 as the graduation rate doubled. Doti inspired hundreds of millions of dollars in donations, quintupled the physical plant, and grew Chapman's endowment by 880% (Bourgeois, 2016; Do, 2015).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is the transformational leadership theory. Burns conceptualized leadership as either transactional or transformational. Transactional leaders lead by social exchange. Burns (1978) provided the example of politicians promising no new taxes in order to win votes, or business leaders offering rewards for productivity or deny rewards for lack of productivity. Burns' transforming leader transcended the transaction between leader and follower to the leader engaging with the followers; creating a dynamic relationship in which followers are transformed into a "new cadre of leaders" (p. 20).

### **Transactional and Transformational Leaders**

Burns' (1978) transactional leadership theory presented the leader and followers as bargainers who would move on to other transactions with other leaders or followers depending on the goods being offered and the need of the buyer. The relationship is essentially short-lived and does not endure long enough for change to happen in the system. Although transforming leaders can be transactional in some circumstances, they are more concerned about securing enduring social change for their followers. The transactional leader in Burns' (1978) theory could therefore not be transformational. While Bass agreed with Burns that

transformational leaders do inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and develop their own leadership capacity in the process (Bass & Riggio, 2006), in contrast to Burns (1978), Bass (1985) suggested that transactional and transformational leadership traits can simultaneously reside in one leader.

### ***The Four Components of Transformational Leadership***

Bass (1985) further developed the Burns' (1978) model of transformational leadership theory by creating the MLQ scale for measuring leader's transformational leadership behaviors. The research questions were based on Bass' (1985) four components of transformational leadership. - Idealized Influence (II), Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individual Consideration (IC).

*Idealized influence (II):* Transformational leaders are role models for their followers. They demonstrate high standards of ethical and moral conduct. They are trustworthy, risk taking, and able to generate a sense of mission among the followers. Followers admire and want to emulate them (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

*Inspirational motivation (IM):* Leaders inspire and motivate followers by adding meaning to their work, encouraging a team spirit, and casting a compelling vision of the future of the organization in such a way that the followers want to come on board to bring the vision to reality (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

*Intellectual stimulation (IS):* Leaders encourage followers to be creative and innovative by stimulating them to approach old situations in new ways and looking at problems from new angles. New ideas and creative solutions are solicited and there is a tolerance for mistakes that may occur in the quest for creativity. (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

*Individual consideration (IC)*: Leaders coach, mentor, and consider their subordinates' individual needs, abilities and aspirations. They are advisors, coaches and mentors. Followers are developed to higher levels of potential through the provision of new learning opportunities. Individual differences in terms of needs and desires are addressed (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006). For the purposes of this study, we only explored Doti's transformational leadership.

### **Transformational Leadership in Education**

Transformational leadership is one of the central and most influential leadership models in the field of educational administration (Bush, 2014). The theory was embraced as an ideal model for school leadership because of its relevance to the contemporary challenges encountered by school principals (Berkovich, 2016). Empirical research evidence shows that transformational leadership has uniformly positive effects on teachers' commitment, satisfaction, perceived leader effectiveness, changing classroom practices, and pedagogical or instructional quality (Anderson, 2017; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Transformational leadership practices of K-12 principals have also been found to have positive effects on student achievement and school culture and climate (Allen, et al., 2015; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannouz, 2016; Hong, 2017; McCarley, et al., 2014).

Pounder (2009) introduced the implementation of transformational-instructional leadership in the higher education classroom. Pounder (2014) asserted that transformational classroom leadership is beneficial for enhancing the quality of the classroom experience for both student and teacher especially in higher education. A meta-analytic review by Pounder (2014) affirmed that instructional transformational leadership behaviors were positively associated with student engagement, satisfaction, motivation, and creativity both in traditional and online university environments (Balwant, 2016; Bogler, et al., 2013; Zacher & Johnson, 2015). Bakar

and Mahmood (2014), Jyoti and Bhau (2015, 2016), and Yildiz and Şimşek (2016) found that transformational leadership behaviors positively correlate with job satisfaction and job performance in higher education settings.

Sun, et al., (2017) noted that research evidence of the antecedents of transformational leadership is scarce “despite its positive impact on school, teacher, and student outcomes” (p. 3). In a meta-analytic review, Sun et al., (2017) found that transformational leadership is related to three sets of antecedents, (a) leader’s qualities (e.g., self-efficacy, values, traits, emotional intelligence); (b) organizational features (e.g., organizational fairness); and (c) the leader’s colleague’s characteristics (e.g., follower’s initial developmental level). The empirical literature on the characteristics of transformational leaders in higher education is sparse, especially as relating to college or university presidents (Basham 2012a, 2012b; Mattar, 2016).

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Rapidly Changing Landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century College**

Leadership in higher institutions of education in the 21st century has become more challenging and complex as the needs of colleges and universities have changed and evolved. Higher education leaders are having to do more with less, amidst a fast-paced environment of technological advancement, online schooling, sky-rocketing tuition rates, and greater accountability from stakeholders (ACE, 2017; Alexander, 2000; Bok, 2015; Bourgeois, 2016; Glassner & Schapiro, 2013; McCaffery, 2010; Mitchell, et al. 2016). Higher education institutions in developing countries have to deal with additional issues of industrial actions by administrative and academic staff, school closures and the governmental instability, leaving colleges severely underfunded, thereby stifling academic innovation and technological advancements which are so vital for 21st century higher education institutions (Dumbili, 2014;

Famade, 2015; Tijani & Adebayo, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted higher education by forcing college closures and necessitating a drastic change in the way education is delivered across the globe. Colleges abandoned face-to-face teaching and utilized alternative strategies for education and assessment to be compliant with social distancing and self-isolation measures. In some situations, online learning has replaced in-person learning, presenting a new set of challenges not only for faculty and staff, but also for the students. College presidents in this new era need transformational leadership skills to be successful in tackling all these challenges (Lim, 2020; Longhurst, et al., 2020).

### **The Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century College President**

In a 2017 study by the American Council on Education, more than 50% of the college presidents are expected to retire by 2022. However, only 24% percent of presidents said their institution has a presidential succession plan. Furthermore, the same ACE report revealed that, 61% of college presidents complained that they never have enough money. Therefore, 65% of presidents spend the bulk of their time on budgeting and financial management, while 58% spend the most time on fund raising. Twenty-eight percent noted that they were least prepared for fund raising when they became college presidents (ACE 2017; Cook, 2012). Decline in government funding and slipping public support exacerbate the financial difficulties for college presidents (Mitchell, et al., 2016). Harris and Ellis (2018) found that financial controversy accounted for the highest reason for involuntary presidential turnovers from 2008-2016.

### **Transactional and Transformational Leadership and College Presidency**

While many quantitative studies have measured the effect of transformational leadership on various school outcomes at K-12 level, there is a paucity of qualitative literature on



transformational leadership practices of college presidents. Transactional and transformational leadership are the two opposing concepts upon which most of the discussion on presidential leadership are based. The transactionalists emphasize collegial leadership based upon consensus and suggested that presidents should not aspire to change their colleges, but rather renew them (Bensimon, et al.,1989; Birnbaum, 1988, 1992; Cohen & March,1986). The transformationalists believe that a college president can indeed make a positive and lasting change in the life of his or her institution (Fisher, 1984; 1994; Fisher & Koch, 1996; Kerr, 1984). Furthermore, Fisher and Koch (1996) argued that transactional leadership is unlikely to stimulate the kind of extraordinary performance from followers for the period of time necessary for transformation to occur. The focus of this study was on Doti's transformational leadership.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative case study was used to examine the transformational leadership practices of James Doti, president emeritus of Chapman University, Orange County, California. The case study was conducted between December 2017 and October 2018. Participants and site of research were chosen using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014). There were 15 participants including Doti, two trustees, eight administrative staff members, three faculty from different schools, and two members of the community of donors. The participants worked with Doti for 10-25 years. Ten of the participants were male and five were female. The age range was from 50-84. All the participants except Doti were given pseudonyms. All participants were Caucasian except for two males from the Middle East.

Data were collected via interviews, document analysis and observation of archival videos. Documents were collected from the Frank Mt. Pleasant Archives at Chapman University and from Doti's post-presidential library. Several documents, such as transcripts of Doti's

speeches, mission and vision statements, copies and updates of the strategic plans were reviewed. (Patton, 2015).

Since Doti was not the president of Chapman University at the time of research, we observed the archival videos of his *State of the University* addresses in lieu of direct observation. The researchers critically observed nine hour-long videos of the addresses from 2008-2016 and made field notes. PowerPoints from the *State of the University* addresses from earlier years of the presidency were examined.

Field notes from the observations of archival videos, and documents were analyzed. Condensation and summarization techniques were used to process textual data from interviews using Microsoft word and Excel. The textual data were loaded on Microsoft Word and codes were generated. The codes were loaded on Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. The researchers started analysis by comparing one unit of information with the next, while “looking for recurring regularities in the data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 203). Based on the analysis of data from the interviews, documents and observation of archival videos, three themes emerged that addressed Doti’s transformational leadership practices: Compelling Vision, Personal Charisma, and Financial Acumen.

### **Results**

The data revealed Doti as a hardworking executive who had a laser focused vision for changing the then Chapman College into Chapman University. He had a winsome personality and was much beloved by his constituents. Doti turned the failing finances of the college around, and raised millions of dollars to fund his vision. Three major themes emerged from the research on this unique case study which not only apply to Doti, but any academic leader as explained below.

## **Compelling Vision**

Doti had a vision for Chapman to be an exciting and vibrant learning community where the students and faculty work together on joint research projects. He articulated the vision in five, five-year strategic plans. The implementation of each strategic plan sequentially resulted in the ultimate transformation of Chapman University.

### ***The Five Strategic Plans***

Doti articulated the vision, which he and his leadership team used as the basis to produce five, five-point, five-year strategic plans over his 25-year tenure. The successful implementation of each strategic plan led to the extraordinary transformation of Chapman University. The first plan focused on student selectivity and preparedness, which involved raising the SATs and providing needs-based scholarships to attract academically prepared students. One step involved changing the athletic program of the school from Division II to Division III which allowed for athletic scholarships to be changed to academic scholarships.

The second strategic plan focused on achieving national program accreditations and establishing new schools of Law and Film. During this time, Doti also launched a Millennium Capital Campaign. One of the participants, Sheila, worked with him on the campaign to raise \$214 million for Chapman University. She recalled:

*He was completely willing to do whatever it took to generate support and interest in the university. That's the thing that I can remember most about his role as president - his undying support for Chapman.*

The third five-year plan focused on enhancing physical facilities, building capital resources and campus infrastructure. Three academic buildings were built during this period, an old library was demolished and replaced with a modern one. A chapel and the music department

were added during that period. Chapman's distance learning program was re-established in a different location as Brandman University, a college for non-traditional students.

The fourth five-year plan focused on faculty recruitment which Doti believed was the pathway to national stature for Chapman University. The university hired nationally known faculty who were scholars and researchers including a Nobel laureate for the business school. The final five-year plan focused on expanding graduate health science programs which included the establishment of a new campus called Rinker Campus, located in Irvine, California. Rinker campus became home to the Colleges of Science and Health sciences. Chapman also added the Keck Center for Science and Technology.

In his September 2015 letter to the Chapman community, Doti discussed his plans for both projects on his final strategic plan:

*During the last year of my presidency, I look forward to helping complete the critically important initial phase of our Harry and Diane Rinker Health Science Campus. It also is gratifying for me to serve my final year as president in planning our new center for science and technology and its groundbreaking scheduled to take place next April. Our progress with these transformational projects... illuminates the remarkable momentum taking place everywhere at Chapman.*

Doti's compelling vision resulted in the total transformation of Chapman University at all levels. Speaking about the transformation of Chapman in an Orange County Register article, Denali noted: "He (Doti) must be credited with transforming a sleepy provincial college into a major force in American education. He has made Chapman a household name in Southern California" (Denali, (pseudonym) Hicks, 2013, p. 20).

**The Succession Plan.** Halfway into his presidency, Doti hired the academic provost with the intention of grooming him to become the next president. They worked together for 10 years before Doti stepped down. Doti explained his succession plan;

*I believe one of the most important responsibilities of a president is to ensure a successful transition to the next president. Many, if not most presidents feel that's the responsibility of the board and only the board. I think that's wrong. I think in higher education, corporations, corporate business leadership, it's critically important for the CEO to ensure that presidential succession goes smoothly.*

Doti's succession plan secured the legacy of his transformational leadership at Chapman University because his successor, has sustained a transformational environment such that Chapman continued to thrive.

### **Personal Charisma**

The participants described Doti as a charismatic leader (using terms such as “magnetic”, “dynamic” and “magical”) who mentored them mostly by example. They saw him as someone who loved people and was beloved and admired by his constituents. He is also humorous, eclectic, and has diverse interests. Henry talked about his personal charisma:

*People said of President John Kennedy that he had a certain magnetism that was qualitative and hard to understand in some set of literature years ago. They used to call it “Q” factor. This mysterious factor, that magnetism that draws people, you know, Jim definitely has that. His leadership style includes this magnetism, abundant energy.*

Brett called it another name, *Clintonesque*, which means that Doti also had this ability that President Clinton had of making one feel like the only person in the room. In similar fashion,

Doti gave people attention, remembered their names, made them feel that their contribution was needed for Chapman University to flourish.

The participants mostly admired how Doti treated everyone with respect and dignity. That was his leadership mantra, which his leadership team fully recognized. Many of the participants confirmed that he demonstrated this quality, not only in his relationship with his constituents but also in policy and decision making. Jacqueline reminisced about this aspect of his character:

*I've never seen Jim dress anyone down. I've never seen him yell at anybody or lose his temper or get angry in any way. . .which I think is really admirable because I've been around him through a lot of situations and no matter who he's dealing with, he never loses his cool. . .he's completely calm, cool, and collected all the time.*

They also admired him for his mentorship, which was mostly by example. Many of the participants learned a great deal from him just by observing him. His leadership style influenced them mostly in the area of people skills, where they learned how to treat their subordinates with respect and also to be relational and caring. Other participants learned from his quantitative data problem solving skills. He was a mentor by default, always available to advise when asked.

Doti mentored through teaching. His students remember him as a thorough teacher who set high standards and had high expectations. Sheila commented on this aspect of his mentorship noting that Doti expected any document that came to his table to be perfect. Sheila stated:

*He expects you to do an excellent job and that when he gets the final product, it should be free of errors. Do what you think is 'my best' versus 'your best.' Challenge yourself to be at the very top of your game... Don't make the same mistake multiple times. I think that's really helpful. Mentorship is learning from your mistakes and how not to repeat them.*

Furthermore, they referred to Doti as a man of integrity who inspired and supported his followers. He worked hard, was passionate and enthusiastic, a renascent and eclectic leader. Participants commented on his sincerity, honesty and integrity which earned him the trust of his constituents. In an *Orange County Metro* magazine article by Reem, (2002), George Argyros, who was the chairman of the board earlier in Doti's presidency noted that: "He's (Jim) entrepreneurial; he is very creative in the way he handles people. His word is a bond; if he tells you something, you believe it. He has credibility" (p. 4).

Doti's honesty in dealing with the faculty and his constituents at large earned him their trust. Tim noted that there was a level of mistrust between the faculty and administration of Chapman College prior to Doti's presidency, but that changed:

*So, when he had some idea in mind, they trusted that it was well conceived and well thought of because they trusted him, and they knew that he would not mislead them or tell them things that are not right or correct.*

Doti was admired for his great public speaking and the way he connected with people. Participants recalled that he had an almost flawless memory, and he remembered people's names whom he might not have seen in years. His memory helped in the delivery of his public speeches, as he seldom needed notes. He had a great rapport with the students and other stakeholders. This ability to communicate and care for people gave him a strong connection to his constituents. Joseph noted that when he first interviewed with him:

*When I was first interviewing. . .we walked across campus to his office. We probably stopped 10 or 15 times for him to talk to students, he knew them, he asked about them, he cared about them, they loved him. That's why I came to the final factor in my decision;*

*what an incredible guy he is, how the students love him and..., how much he loves the students.*

Many of the participants referred to Doti as an “eclectic” person with a great sense of humor. He had many other interests including mountain climbing, running marathons, cooking, dancing, acting, reading, writing, and raising chickens. He used all of his eclectic abilities to promote Chapman University. In an *Orange County Register* magazine article, by Ferrel, (2013), Doti’s friend and fellow Economics professor, Adibi aptly described this character trait: “He can read, watch movies, and suddenly run data and do research and analysis, and go get funding. He can work on 10 different projects at the same time, and all of them come out perfect. I wish I had that ability” (p. 6).

In his annual letter to students, Doti recommended books for them to read over the summer, he would also recommend movies he had recently watched, give a brief overview of the movie, and let them know if the movie was already on DVD. He made the books on his reading list available at the Chapman University bookstore. He wrote articles about his mountain climbing in the *Orange County Register*, and ran alongside students during their annual 5k runs.

### **Financial Acumen**

Although no direct questions were asked relating to his financial skills, all the participants talked about Doti’s financial acumen and fundraising prowess. They described his fundraising with such terms as “exceptional,” “consummate”, “prolific”, “spectacular”, “good”, “great” and “incredible.” Doti also demonstrated a strong financial management skill. As a professor of economics with underpinnings in business administration and accounting, he had the necessary understanding of the business and financial aspects of running a large organization.



Given Chapman was in the throes of a financial crisis when he took office, he acknowledged that his training in financial matters was instrumental to his success:

*I don't know what I would've done really. I would not have been a successful president if I didn't have that underpinning in accounting. Especially in the early years when we were struggling and when I became president, we were losing money. It was critically important to turn that around.*

Doti critically appraised the programs at Chapman and moved to drop those that were no longer in alignment with the vision of the university. He helped change the athletics program from Division II to Division III freeing up \$2-million for academic scholarship funds. He reduced the number of distance learning programs scattered all over the nation, and strategically focused on Southern California. His strategies included raising the tuition, raising the SAT scores and giving scholarships to better-prepared students. Doti did several things that seemed oppositional to current leadership trends. One radical thing that Doti did early in his presidency, even while the university struggled financially, was to increase faculty salaries. The faculty felt that the previous administrations had not been fair in giving raises, because of perceived feelings of favoritism. Per Tim, Doti worked to change that perception:

*Jim was the exact opposite, he made everything extremely clear. It was very obvious what he was doing. He did not take sides with some people against others; he treated everybody respectfully and equally. So, he built trust with the faculty.*

At the State of the University addresses, he would show the American Association of University Professors, (AAUP) rankings of faculty salaries every year until it moved from the lowest group to the top ten percent of faculty salaries in the nation. Increasing the faculty salaries

sent a profound and lasting message and restored the faculty's trust in the administration and enhanced esprit de corps in the Chapman Community.

Doti raised funds for new buildings. Sheila, the executive vice president for university advancement, worked directly with Doti during the Millennium Capital Campaign. She recalled that raising funds required a lot of hard work and tenacity:

*Jim is a spectacular fundraiser. In my early days, we worked together, building the fundraising team and that was done through a tremendous amount of hard work. He was willing to put a huge portion of his time towards generating support for the university. I'd say he spent three quarters of his time on the campaign, connecting with donors.*

Doti came up with creative ideas to raise funds for Chapman. In an *Orange County Register* article, one of the trustees, David Wilson, said about Chapman "There isn't a building or a park or a place or a room at Chapman that doesn't have somebody's name on it" (Ferrel, 2013, p. 5). Wilson gave \$2 million to have his name on the Holly and David Wilson field on the Orange campus. He also bought two old street cars to shuttle students to and from Old Towne, Orange County. Those trolleys were named for his wife: "Holly's Trolleys".

Doti explained how this occurred:

*There is one aspect of fundraising that many people overlook and that is matching a donor with the need on campus. By getting to know their interests, their family, getting to know them as people, you get a sense of what they feel is important in our community and what role the university can play in fulfilling that need.*

Another creative way through which Doti raised funds was the annual fundraiser dinners called *American Celebration*- now known as *Chapman Celebrates*. At this event, students from

the college of performing arts showcase their talent. Chapman donors would buy a table and fill the tables with their friends who could become future donors for Chapman. The *American Celebration* events also yielded many new friends for Chapman. Doti nurtured these new Chapman friends, encouraging them to become donors to the university. He thrilled students and donors every year by joining the students in the performance, beginning with short sketches, and progressed into dancing at the annual fundraisers. More than \$2 million was raised annually from *American Celebration*. The funds raised from the event were used for student scholarships.

Chapman trustees were a vital part of Doti's fundraising efforts. They generously gave to Chapman, but they also brought other donors on board. George Argyros, a wealthy businessman, was a Chapman alumnus and chairman of the board when Doti became president. He recruited other businessmen to join the board and they not only gave generously towards Chapman projects, they also helped to raise funds. Tim recalled how the trustees were supportive of Doti's vision and fundraising:

*He (Jim) was able to attract a large number of very wealthy trustees who were able to donate significantly to the university. That's how he was able to build all these beautiful buildings that you see around the campus.*

Doti's knowledge of economics and accounting greatly enhanced his transformational leadership attributes. William, a trustee chairman emeritus and community donor at Chapman University, who was chairman of the board for half of Doti's tenure elaborated on his business skills:

*Most presidents that I know don't have any business education, and yet a university, even a small one like Chapman, is a business. You need to understand how to read financial statements, you need to understand how best to allocate resources. You need to*

*understand the best cost-effective way to do something. But these are not academic questions, these are business questions. For somebody with Jim's education and experience and background, he understood that.*

Henry, a vice president and Chief Operating Officer at Chapman University, praised Doti's business skills from an educator's viewpoint:

*So, he looked hard at the business model that would transform Chapman. And this is part of his leadership style. He can take an objective, detailed, rigorous and sober look at how Chapman is functioning as a business. Jim understands budgets. Jim understands numbers. Jim understands financial statements, and he gets along great with business people.*

Within a 25-year period, Doti grew Chapman's accumulated gift support from \$4 million to \$568.9 million, the endowment fund from \$30 million to \$300 million, and grew Chapman University's net assets from \$89.3 million to \$1.2 billion.

### **Discussion**

The results from the study validated the empirical and theoretical literature, but also included many new discoveries. The findings addressed pertinent issues in the literature concerning higher education presidency in the 21st century and underscored the need for transformational college presidents. The study also validated the transformational leadership theory as proposed by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), but the results revealed the difference in measuring transformational leadership qualitatively rather than quantitatively.

Doti personified transformational leadership and exhibited all the traits expected in a transformational leader by the Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). However, measuring transformational leadership qualitatively rather than quantitatively on the MLQ scale revealed

that there were other aspects of his leadership style that contributed to the transformation of Chapman University. Also, the element of time which is an important issue in Burn's (1978; 2003) model of transformational leadership is critical. Burns noted that transformational leadership must occur over a period of time, ultimately resulting in change within the system. He also expected the transformational leader to develop other leaders who could sustain the change in the system. Doti fulfilled these conditions having served 25 years as president with measurable and progressive change in the college at the end of his tenure. He also groomed his successor, who was able to sustain the transformation after Doti's storied tenure.

Doti's compelling vision, which he articulated in five, five-year strategic plans, turned out to be his strongest transformational leadership trait (Inspirational Motivation). This is significant because ACE (2017) reported that less than 20% of college presidents consider strategic plans to be important for the future of their school. This may be the reason for few transformational leaders in higher education presidency. Doti's personal charisma (Idealized Influence) was critical in the transformation process because when he became president, morale was low on campus, and the college was in dire financial straits. Doti's charisma was instrumental in persuading the board, senior staff and faculty to buy-in to his vision for Chapman University.

Doti's financial acumen and exceptional fundraising was a surprise finding, a strength which the participants could not separate from his transformational leadership practices. Doti's background in economics and accounting came in handy in bringing Chapman College from the brink of financial collapse to a university of national stature. He was also a prolific fund raiser who dedicated time and energy to raising the finances for his vision for Chapman University to be accomplished. Qualitative investigation of Doti's transformational leadership went beyond the

research questions to reveal vital aspects of his leadership style that would have gone unnoticed in a quantitative inquiry.

### **Implications**

Doti's strategic plans were no doubt the secret of the success of his presidency. The ACE (2017) survey revealed that many presidents do not consider strategic plans to be important for the future of their colleges. This data is problematic because according to Seltzer 2017, presidents who do not have strategic plans or base their decisions on institutional research will only solve problems as they arise.

This problem is not unconnected to the short presidential tenure which is about 6.5 years (ACE, 2017). Sherman (2018) noted that a president needs at least ten years of tenure to be able to cast a vision for the future of the college and successfully implement it. However, in the ACE, (2017) report, 47% of presidents of degree-granting institutions said they received a written contract of five years or more when they accepted the job. Three-year contracts were common among community colleges. If the tenure has become so short, college presidents will not be motivated to plan for long term solutions, rather they will tend to be transactional presidents who only try to maintain the status quo (Bensimon, et al., 1989; Birnbaum, 1988, 1992; Cohen & March, 1986).

The reason for the short presidential tenures is due to an aging presidential population, many of whom are set to retire by 2022 (ACE, 2017). Outgoing presidents should pre-empt this situation by starting a succession plan. Doti started his own succession plan midway into his 25-year presidency. College presidents who cannot find an internal person to replace them should start the search for a president whom they think might take the college in the direction it needs to go. Presidents and boards of trustees should team up to find a successor early and possibly

provide a time of overlap where the incoming president is able to understudy the experienced outgoing president. This will make the transition to the next presidency smoother and forestall the forecasted upheaval in higher education presidency due to mass retirements. The good news is that instead of allowing the mass exodus from the presidency to create a shortage of college presidents in the near future, boards of trustees, presidential search-firms and higher education institutions should use the situation as an opportunity to recruit a new and diversified generation of college presidents.

### **Financial Implications**

Fund raising and financial management posed a great challenge for college presidents in the ACE (2017) study. Virtually all the participants in this study lauded Doti's fund raising skills. He had a few recommendations on fund raising:

#### ***Recommendations For Fund Raising***

- Articulate the vision for the college effectively.
- Manage institutional finance with prudence.
- Excel at the institution's vision.
- Get acquainted with donors.
- Match donors with the need on campus.

Doti noted that he would not have been as successful as Chapman's president if he did not have the background in economics and accounting. He highlighted the importance of financial viability in running a college. He said that having a good vision for the school, and a great relationship with constituents are not enough on their own, because the vision cannot be accomplished without financial viability.

**Recommendations For Financial Management.** Doti also had a few words of advice for college presidents on financial management.

- Presidents should be involved in the budget and financial operations of the university.
- Presidents who do not have a background in finances should learn it.
- Presidents should partner with the Chief Financial Officer in understanding and leading the financial operations of the university, including the budget.
- Presidents need to grow the net assets of their schools. If an institution could do well in net asset growth, then there will be enough finances to support moving towards the school's vision and investing in the resources that make the realization of the vision possible (Doti, 2017).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings from this study, more work needs to be done on transformational leadership practices of presidents of other types of higher education institutions including public, private mid-sized, community, liberal arts and historically black colleges, using other qualitative designs such as phenomenology and multiple case studies to further illuminate the reasons for the rarity of transformational college presidents. Qualitative studies to determine other reasons for short tenure of presidents other than age will shed more light on the phenomenon. In addition, studies should be done on the importance of data-driven institutional research for strategic planning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century colleges.

### **Conclusion**

The single instrumental case study explored the transformational leadership practices of Dr. James L. Doti, the president emeritus of Chapman University, Orange County, California. The findings from this study provided many lessons for higher education presidency.



Transformation requires time and change; However, the average tenure for current college presidents is 6.5 years. Outgoing presidents need to design a succession plan that will ensure their replacement. The literature also highlighted financial struggles and fund raising as the greatest challenge of college presidents, the findings from this study provided lessons for that. Current and aspiring college presidents need to acquire skills in financial management so that they can be fully involved in planning the finances of their colleges.

Less than 20 percent of current presidents in the ACE (2017) study reported that strategic planning was important for the future of their colleges, and only 12% utilized institutional research to inform decision making. This could be the most important lesson from the findings in this study. Laser-focused and data-driven strategic plans over several years was the secret to the ultimate transformation of Chapman University. Without this kind of focused strategic plans, and data-informed decision making, college presidents run the risk of jumping from one issue to another without ever addressing the long term (Seltzer, 2017). While financial challenges and the imminent change of guard in higher education presidency appeared to be the greater issues in the ACE (2017) report, the silent reason for rarity of transformational leadership in higher education presidency may be that more than 80% of presidents do not consider strategic planning to be important for the future of their colleges, and 88 percent of current presidents make decisions that are not based on institutional research.

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