Complexity Leadership Theory:
A Conceptual Model for Christian Higher Education

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Christian higher education is under pressure to thrive in the social, political, financial, and educational environments. Resources are limited and budgetary constraints force employees to do more with fewer resources. The danger is that morale from the employees decrease, which flows through to student success and satisfaction. Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) can be a leadership framework to understand how relationships between employees influence organizational outcomes and vice versa, thereby improving effectiveness and efficiency of available resources. The proposed conceptual model of CLT can be used as a framework to improve structures, decision-making and resource management in higher educational institutions.

Keywords: complexity leadership theory, higher education, leadership, decision-making, organizational behavior

INTRODUCTION

Christian higher educational institutions have come under increasing scrutiny in recent years in a number of key areas, including political, financial and affordability for students, and efficacy of education (Eaton, 2011). Christian higher education is facing unprecedented pressure to sustain and thrive in the 21st century. Even respected academics have stated that up to half of higher educational institutions from certain segments will close or go bankrupt within the next 10-15 years (Christensen, 2018). Colleges and universities are feeling a greater pressure to offer more services and facilities to an increasingly demanding client base, while at the same time seeing diminishing resources.

So then, how can Christian universities organize their human resources to create the maximum possibility of viability moving into the future? Complexity leadership theory (CLT) can be used as a framework for viewing power dynamics to understand how decisions are made and how to deliver on the promises of a top-quality education by better utilizing their limited resources.

This article investigates whether a conceptual model for CLT can be utilized within Christian higher educational institutions. Within the model, there are certain leadership mechanisms that are used by employees of the organizations to impart influence and confirm certain aspects relating to mission and vision. An aspect for future research would be to study if any of the six leadership mechanisms have greater impact through the CLT model.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Political Pressure

These schools need to guide their conversations by utilizing a specific religious framework to guide their thoughts and actions. A call to go back to the fundamental aspect of operating for the greater good of all has been getting louder in recent years (Dahlvig, 2018).

Especially schools in California, where legislators are aggressively targeting private, Christian colleges and universities, must be very careful in their strategy formation. They are under pressure to justify using public funds in religious institutions, and various bills are dealing specifically with removing the church from the state (Bill Text - SB-1146 Discrimination: Postsecondary Education., 2016). California politicians threatened to remove or reduce funding for higher educational institutions through various legislative bills that made their way all the way to the governor's desk (McGreevy, 2016). The context was through perceived discrimination towards LGTBQ students.

In her research, Schreiner (2016) has proposed that Christian universities need to adopt a broad sweeping duality in their picture for the future. These universities need to be, "committed to faithful learning and to the intellectual, personal, and spiritual development of its students," yet "engaging in holistic, flexible, and real-world applicable modes of customized learning" (p. 2). The schools have typically been very good at the first part of the statement. It is only recently that they have been focusing on the second part of the statement.

Financial & Affordability Pressures

The next generation of students have greater access to more schools and research data to compare what school will offer them the best deal. This has resulted in additional staff positions for the increased services, which in turn results in increased budgets and therefore increased tuition for students. This perpetual cycle of increased services and tuition result in market dynamics that play out in various forms throughout education (Jessop, 2017). For instance, more management consultancy work in higher education; governmental funding becomes more limited; foundations have become more sophisticated in awarding their funds to universities; branding/marketing of universities according to rankings has increased; and many other aspects to try to differentiate one institution from another.

Although there is a vast amount of creative thinking to improve systems and processes—even to radically change the way education is delivered—nearly three quarters of all change initiatives will fail (Mather & Hess, 2013). When these initiatives fail, it is primarily staff and faculty who are required to retrench and fill the holes, but with an increased skepticism to new initiatives. Christian higher education needs a clarity of purpose to move forward in order to understand what needs to be focused on.

Staff, faculty and administration are typically carrying out multiple roles due to budgetary constraints. This can result in stress and lower morale (Bendermacher et al., 2017). The typical path for decision-making and power controls within a university has been slowly changing due to all the market forces listed above. Even presidents used to be nearly exclusively selected from the academic and research departments. Now, there is an increased need for presidents to be more like CEO's of the organization, which means they are coming from a broader discipline experience. Many times, their primary role is external fundraising in order to reach the aggressive financial objectives—limiting their impact on daily operations (Wecker et al., 2014). This can create a power vacuum as the president is the face of the university, yet he/she is more externally focused than internally active.

As the new generation of students have started their undergraduate degrees, they have essentially forced universities to justify why education is so expensive. Not all challenges to justify education in the 21st century are bad. This has brought about healthy conversation and even innovation to see how funds are spent and how programs can become more effective on the ROI. There is a correlation between increased administrative spending and decreased student engagement (Ryan, 2005).

Efficacy Pressures

Schools are at an impasse for how they will continue to operate in a post-modern (post-Christian) environment. This new reality has led to many discussions and strategic planning sessions that deal with the topic of what the ultimate purpose is of a Christian higher education institution (Dockery, 2008). In addition to purpose, schools are grappling with the appropriate use of emerging technology, business principles, communication mechanisms, pedagogy, and organizational structures.

However, there must be an appropriate balance between purpose vs. pragmatics. There has been an urgent, strategic push that has been carried out in the past few decades dealing with technology. Christian universities have been tempted to side-step the difficult, more fundamental conversations dealing with purpose versus focusing on strategy and annual objectives (Schreiner, 2016).

Universities do not operate in a typical manner compared to the corporate sector when looking at internal leadership development and succession planning. The average tenure of a university president has gone down from eight and a half years to seven years (Selingo, 2016). Once it is time to hire a new president, most of the time the newly elected president is hired from outside the institution. The process to hire a new president can extend beyond a full year. This process, which typically involves a selection committee has been criticized for the long length of time it takes to hire the next president. According to Deloitte (2017), nearly seventy-five percent of presidents they surveyed have not identified a list of possible successors. After the president is hired, they will typically take the first year of their leadership to understand the factors involved before rolling out a new strategic plan they envision for the university. The result is that the university has delayed any significant strategic directional movement while the hiring and analyzing phases occurred. The disruption to students, employees and the identity of the university requires large amounts of energy to overcome.

Students are increasingly working jobs that require them to split their time between learning and working. Transformational innovation has occurred through the development of technology within the context of learning and delivery of content (Fishman & Sledge, 2014). For the first time in history, non-traditional students (online, evening, adult) are the majority of college students and the trend continues to increase (Reichlin et al., 2018). This massive shift in the educational landscape has required schools to either adapt or conscientiously decide to not modify their learning modalities.

The quality of education throughout colleges and universities has been scrutinized for the past couple of decades. The scrutiny increased with the Great Recession of 2007. To what extent were students being prepared for life after college? What were the primary objectives of universities in general? Many of these questions were being asked by the media and others as reports came out that students were carrying large amounts of debt and were not able to secure a professional position after graduation. Research has shown that faculty do matter (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). That statement is certainly a plain truth, however digging deeper his research showed the amount of time faculty were diverted from their primary responsibilities (teaching and research) had a direct correlation to diminished positive student preparation for graduation. Certainly, within Christian higher education, the emphasis is on direct interaction with the professors. While his research was secular (not focusing on Christian higher education) one can argue that Christian higher education is better positioned to prepare students, since the interaction with professors occurs on a more intimate scale.

This is what the Christian university must emphasize through acting out their worldview. A worldview can be defined as, "…serving a particular function, encompassing deeply held beliefs about reality that shape and influence how individuals think and act" (Valk et al., 2011). It can be described that this is the overarching purpose of Christian higher education, namely, to educate people with a distinct perspective that God is the ultimate authority and that through Him all things exist. The Bible may not explicitly explain double-entry accounting or ROI on product development pipelines; however, it will provide a lens through which people may operate with integrity and values that are not situationally based. This will allow employees to become greater stewards of the limited resources available within their universities.

ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Frederik Taylor can be called the father of organizational behavior. In his seminal work, *Scientific Management,* he laid out the premise for the ultimate purpose for management, namely, "secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with maximum prosperity for each employee" (2012, p. 7). He later clarified that prosperity is not limited to profit for the company or high salary for the employee. Rather, he argues that maximum prosperity goes further than the financial parameters and moves toward the "highest state of excellence" (p. 7).

This "highest state of excellence" (p. 7) is really the first time that someone created parameters to define the interdependence between employer and employee. He does take a focused conclusion in saying that the employee's greatest state of excellence is efficiency. Taylor goes on to say that the employee is at their best when they are also turning out their largest daily output.

Organizational behavior has shown that humans are more nuanced than this, yet his contribution through scientific management and organizational behavior cannot be understated. Granted, the era in which Taylor wrote his research, the market was very much a production economy and not the knowledge economy that is present now. To this end, organizational behavior has gone through various renditions as further research has been conducted in the pursuing decades.

The term 'meaningful work' has had an ambiguous definition over the years and can be subjective to the individual. Not everyone will define meaningful work the same way. This creates a potential challenge for academic research due to either being too vague to cover all possible characteristics or to be too narrow and exclude key components of the intrinsic value of work that is meaningful to all layers of society. Earlier research has said meaningful work is found in purpose (Pink, 2009); meaning (Frankl, 1992); sufficient wages, independence (Bowie, 1998); respect (Schwartz, 1982); and various other characteristics.

The importance of this is that employees in Christian higher educational institutions typically work due to the mission and vision of the school. Organizationally, they are called upon to take on additional roles and responsibilities. The employees may still be passionate about the purpose the school has to transform students' lives, however there is a threshold for how much they are willing to sacrifice for the sake of the mission. That is why it is critical for the universities to truly understand their ultimate purpose and why they operate. Appropriately so, Christian universities need to understand how they operate for the good of the individual, the community, and the Kingdom (Schreiner, 2018).

It is in understanding the purpose, that will help the university avoid becoming too mechanistic and operate purely based on Frederick's management theory. Organizational behavior within Christian universities must have a culture that accentuates the sometimes-illogical focus on student development over the pure financial metrics.

Communication and Decision-Making

Information is always flowing through any organization. It is important to understand how the information is disseminated and received. Simply communicating facts is not sufficient. Rather, the flow of information must be able to show content, volume and direction of information, but also include the factors including economic, cultural, legal, political, and technological for the dissemination of information (Kougias et al., 2012).

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) a leadership theory which looks at the dyadic relationship between leader and follower has shown a positive correlation between high level leader/follower interaction to increase innovation and creativity (Dansereau et al., 1975; Carnevale et al., 2017). What this means is the stronger the relationship between leader and follower, the more inclined the follower will view their work through a creative and innovative mindset in order to improve the overall results of their position, department and ultimately the organization in which they are employed. It is through this perspective that the relationship between administrators and faculty/staff is so critical to the connection and ownership of one's duties within Christian higher education.

Within Christian higher education, information and decision-making flow through annual committees made up of a mix of faculty, staff and administrators, recurring departmental meetings, administrative

oversight councils, faculty governance, student involvement, and eventually through the board of trustees. There may be one president or chairman of the board, but they are not able to effectively be everywhere to influence all decisions. Therefore, the importance of understanding leadership events, as compared to leaders, will help create a broader understanding for how organizations can determine the effectiveness of their mission and vision.

Christian higher education is a complex environment with many different constituents to satisfy (employees, students, alumni, parents, donors, and governmental bodies), decision-making requirements (academic, financial and regulatory), and people who make these decisions (administrators, faculty, committees, staff, and board of trustees). The importance of an appropriate usage of the various leadership mechanics (generative, administrative, community-building, information-gathering, and information-using) becomes critical to process information in a healthy and dynamic manner.

Traditional leadership theories view the linear, hierarchical structure (functional titles, budget holders, characteristics of the individual, etc.) as the primary method to understand leadership. However, CLT focuses more on leadership events, rather than leaders themselves (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). Leadership events, Lichtenstein, explains further, are, "…perceived segments of action whose meaning is created by the interactions of others involved in producing it" (p. 2). This nuanced, yet critical difference is essential in the development for how CLT can effectively be utilized within a higher educational context. As leadership happens within an educational institution, the focus then moves to what happens during the interactions and what the results could possibly be in a nonlinear, emergent fashion. For CLT, one of the primary anchor points is the institution itself will produce an emergent, self-organizing result (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008). In other words, the feedback loop between employees will affirm necessary direction.

In a nonlinear construct, such as in complex environments, information shared may result in different reactions to the data based on employee relationships, trust and other factors. As was shown through research, middle managers in a university willfully withheld information from senior management in order to protect their division or program (Hancock & Hellawell, 2003). This created a feedback loop of protectionism and distrust within the school. Additionally, research found that when there was a less complex environment, administrative leadership, which is more hierarchical was relied on more heavily as compared to adaptive styles of leadership typically found in complexity leadership models (Murphy et al., 2017).

COMPLEXITY LEADERSHIP THEORY

Historical leadership theories were built around the personality, skills, talents, and character of the leader individually (Northouse, 2016). CLT is an emerging leadership theory that has gained traction for the past roughly twenty years. There were various sciences from which CLT was inspired from: meteorology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, and biology (Burnes, 2005). Being born out of these various disciplines from the decades prior to that, CLT has shifted the focus from the individual leader to the system in which the leader operates.

Leadership, then, becomes an emergent force that is the result of interpersonal interactions (J. K. Hazy, 2007). It is no longer specifically dependent on the intrinsic abilities of the individual leader. This has brought about a new way of thinking for how leadership influences, and even more fundamentally what leadership is. At the broadest level, leadership can be defined as influence (Northouse, 2016). However, in the context of complexity leadership theory, this definition needs to be nuanced a bit. An alternative definition that is appropriate for the context of CLT would be expressed as such, "Individual potency to enact organized activity within a social network" (J. K. Hazy, 2010).

Traditional leadership science will work towards a clear causality between leader and other variables. In those theories there is a reductionist framework to link the variables in a linear fashion (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Regine & Lewin, 2000). However CLT looks at connectedness of the system and the emergence of an ordered system through a non-linear impact of leadership and structures (Koopmans, 2017). CLT approaches the system to understand the interwoven signals that help create the dynamic relationships. As

organizations focus on the nonlinear processes, they will begin to see relationships as the new 'bottom line' (Regine & Lewin, 2000).

There are various factors that make up the complexity leadership theory model:

1. Human interaction: there must be at least two human agents in order for complexity to exist within this model (Marion, 1999; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001)
2. Complex adaptive systems: an organization is learning and adapting continuously based on the input and feedback on the micro, mezzo and meta levels (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007)
3. Non-linear emergent impact of social influence between leaders and followers: (J. K. Hazy, 2010; Marion, 1999)

Humans are continuously receiving, analyzing and interpreting data, which causes them to influence and be influenced in their settings. Because of this constant data processing, the environment in which they operate is in constant flux. There is a paradox in how humans process information based on their cognitive abilities and self-awareness (Braathen, 2016). This creates uncertainty in how data flows from one person to another, thereby increasing the complexity in the setting.

Complex adaptive systems (CAS) are an integral part of CLT. They are a basic unit of analysis in complexity science—open, dynamic systems where its parts are interrelated and connected through common purpose or perspective (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). CAS have an emergent ability to anticipate, and this area is one of the least understood elements, yet it is critical to understand for the furtherment of complexity science (Holland, 1992). Holland later states, "It is the process of becoming, rather than the never-reached end points, that we must study if we are to gain insight" (p. 20). This has made studying CLT difficult, because there has been measuring techniques to be able to objectively research organizations through this lens.

The nonlinear influence that occurs internally and externally is consistent with any other living organism (Marion, 1999). While there will still be causality between variables, it is not defined as a cause-effect relationship. In other words, the whole is not simply the sum of its parts. The human interactions within the social structure of the organization influences the behaviors through areas such as needs and limitations of the human.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF CLT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Hazy and Uhl-Bien (2015) wrote an article that moved the framework of CLT forward towards an operational construct. Their research and formulation of a leadership framework deals with prior research and proposes new areas for CLT research to further the conversation in this area. They defined five leadership functions that allow organizations to analyze, decide and change. They are generative leadership, administrative leadership, community-building leadership, information gathering leadership, and information using leadership. They will be explained in more detail throughout this next section. They interact, influence and identify both the fine grain interactions and the coarse grain properties of the organization.

Fine grain interactions are fleeting interactions that occur between various individuals. Title, responsibilities, reputation, or other variables that may have played a part in other leadership theories are not singled out here (J. Hazy, 2013). These interactions are conversations in the hallway, meetings between departments, or other transient interactions. They are critical, however, to the overall operational leadership of the organization. Through these interactions, policies are created, strategies set, directional movement is made.

Coarse-grain properties are a product of fine-grain interactions (J. K. Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). They are organizational processes and outcomes that are not necessarily synonymous, but they are patterns reinforced at the fine-grain interaction level. Coarse-grain properties can include policies, strategies, market performance, or other organizational wide initiative. More importantly, though, they are not predetermined; they are patterns, so each organization may have different coarse-grain properties. Even though coarse-grain properties are patterns made up of fine-grain interactions, they are not the same as the parts to the

whole. In fact, it has been shown that the greater the pattern with coarse-grain properties, the greater the asymmetry happens with fine-grain interactions (Goldstein et al., 2010).

Generative Leadership

The generative leadership (GL) function influences the fine-grain interactions that are experienced daily in each organization. However, it does not stop there. GL is utilized to modify the fine-grain interactions to multiply the variety of possible coarse-grain properties to assist in organizational behavior and the development for the future (J. K. Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). GL works as a sort of emergent catalyst for the coarse-grain properties. Certain outcomes may include entrepreneurial processes, new product launches, pilot of new product/service.

GL helps to address risk and uncertainty (J. K. Hazy & Prottas, 2018). GL helps the organization's resilience by providing options that allow for greater adaptability. The ability for GL to be present and practiced assists in the freedom to experiment and find alternative solutions. For GL to be truly effective, knowledge sharing and appropriate conflict resolution need to be practiced and valued.

Within Christian higher education, this can be a difficult balance to achieve. There are certain elements of kindness in which employees can be reticent about disagreeing with someone or going against the norm in order to explore new ways of operating. The innovation that occurs when GL is exercised properly helps to create an environment of mistake tolerance—that being the willingness to attempt new activities with the expectation that they may not succeed. The necessity of GL to proliferate Christian higher education creates a certain intrinsic tension: concern for moving away from the mission vs. exploring better utilization of resources. GL cannot just be carried out untethered, otherwise there would be too much waste in the system. There needs to be strategic allocation of hours, finances and other resources to apply appropriate boundaries.

Christian universities are not typically known for their innovative nature. Yet, GL has brought about an intentional extension of the classroom and created community service days, mission trips, and other co-curricular activities that build upon the mission of the university. In certain aspects, growth of student numbers comes about through GL conversations. One of the popular ways to increase student enrollment is to increase athletic teams. This may create an initial influx of students, but there are additional challenges relating to a sudden increase of student athletes if the support system around academic advising, student development services, and other business operations throughout the university.

Administrative Leadership

In earlier research, leadership was divided into three types: administrative, adaptive and enabling leadership (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). However, utilizing the five areas of leadership in this article has allowed a greater clarity for understanding leadership in a complex environment. Administrative leadership (AL) implements operational policies and processes through the entrainment of fine-grain interactions in order to reinforce coarse-grain properties. AL is critical in providing clarity throughout all the complexity. AL reinforces unifying action towards a common goal. AL is typically hierarchical in nature, meaning AL is utilized by those with functional authority to ensure interpretations of policies and strategies are uniformly understood. However, AL is not restricted to those who hold functional authority. Anyone in the university can engage in a meeting to clarify the articulation of objectives and next steps. AL's practices could include target setting, clear job descriptions, and discretionary decision making with resources.

AL promotes the convergence between employees in order to achieve the desired outcome (J. K. Hazy & Prottas, 2018). AL is primarily internally focused and delivers results for the operational near-term. AL does not look for the experimentation nor exposure to new opportunities. This is quite contrary to GL, however in balance they create a harmony to be good stewards of resources. Both AL and GL can operate together or independently of each other.

In Hazy and Prottas' research, AL's focus is to sustain the short-term operational success through the appropriate resources (p. 329). AL assesses the requisite resources needed for the ongoing operation and then makes decisions to optimally utilize those resources. The important aspect of AL is that it is resource

focused as compared some of the other leadership mechanisms. AL's objective is to maximize return on the usage of the resources.

Within a strictly Christian higher educational context, an example of AL would be annual allocation of budgetary resources for various departments through the CFO's office. In this manner, there would be discussions relating to prospective student yield for the upcoming academic year. The decisions made would be based on maximizing results that were strategically decided either through committees or other administrative groups. There are always perceived winners/losers in budgetary talks. Certain academic programs receive reduced funding, while others receive increased budgets. Information would be used from internal and external sources, for example: national high school graduation numbers, attraction and retention in certain academic programs, and certain strategic initiatives fitting the mission of the university.

Community-Building Leadership

Community-building leadership (CBL) is focused on bringing the members of the organization into the sense that they all belong together in the same clan. CBL will develop corporate identity and highlight motivation for why things are being done. This will look to develop the organizational citizenship behavior of the employees to extract greater benefit for employee and company.

CBL must be careful in how it is delivered, because if it is not authentic, then the results will differ wildly from the original intent (Wingate et al., 2019). CBL attempts to create the directional picture for where the organization is going. If CBL was a person, it would be the organizer and life of the party. However, that is not meant to minimize the importance of what CBL does. Without CBL, the organization would only be policies and targets and accountability. For people to truly have profound meaning in their work, they need to be made a part of the larger whole.

CBL helps to empower employees through collective decision-making and pushing ownership of ideas and actions to the employees themselves (Doyle, 2004). CBL helps to build a culture open for inquiry and critique. Respectful academic dialogue can occur by utilizing CBL and challenging a research project in order to sharpen the results of the author.

A Christian university can utilize CBL through the admissions department and creating a unique attractional event that helps prospective students make their decision to attend. If GL was used in this type of situation, the outcome and programming of the event may look very different. CBL would bring employees who are able to connect with prospective students, regardless of their functional titles.

Information Gathering

Information gathering leadership (IGL) is really the intentional learning partner that leadership employs. Knowledge cannot stay static and leadership must engage in intentional fine-grain interactions to cross-pollenate knowledge sharing. IGL is always learning from processes that have been implemented. It would look at how a product can improve, how to do an event differently, etc. IGL allows the individuals to absorb and sense information throughout their interactions (J. K. Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015). This is important because they compare it to the coarse-grain properties to validate the information.

Christian higher education is typically very strong in the IGL form of relationships. There are numerous committees, deans, departments, and governmental instances that are collecting and assimilating data for various purposes. Built into the regional accreditation process is the review of program reviews that collect data. IGL is a bedrock of higher education in general. However, there is caution to be used as data sources are not always reliable. It is through the data collection process where many mistakes are made, or personal bias creeps into the final result (Podsakoff et al., 2003). For instance, going back to the department leaders mentioned above who were purposefully withholding information from senior leadership in order to protect their department or program. If the data gathering process used the data set is complete, decisions would be made that could potentially skew the direction of the university.

There is always a tension between cultural data externally and missional data internally. For instance, if a Christian university has a mission to only accept faith professing Christians to their school, yet political pressure is being applied to schools to accept any student, the decisions made for the directional movement

may go against what the information is telling them to do. At this point, the justification needs to satisfy the discrepancy from moving away from the data.

Information Using Leadership

Information using leadership (IUL) takes output that has been collected through the integration and synthesis mechanism and utilizes them to set the direction of the organization in a way that cannot easily be undone. IUL will look at fine-grain interactions to implement structural changes in the coarse-grain properties.

For instance, a Christian university may see the ongoing opportunity of starting an online program for students to study anywhere they are located. In order to get this done, the school must submit their rationale and planning documents to the regional accreditor for approval. Once the school receives approval, they start marketing the program. As students start enrolling, the school has limited choices in terms of just cancelling the program. Once a school does something like this, they alter to context of the school regarding support services, academic pedagogy, faculty hires, and alumni.

FIGURE 1
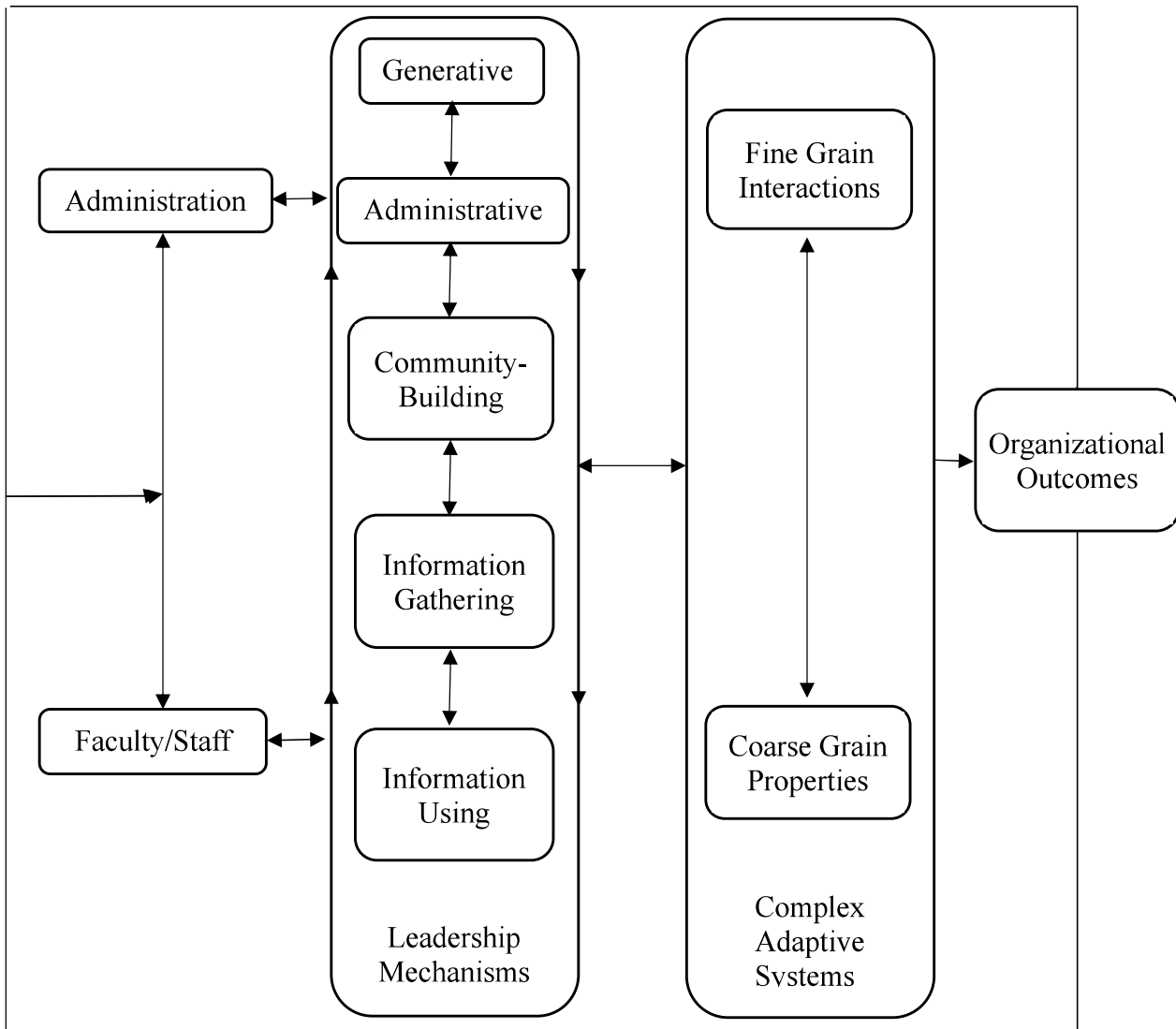**CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF CLT IN OPERATIONAL USE FOR HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

Figure 1 provides a conceptual model for how CLT frames interactions and outcomes of a higher educational institution. Leadership events (leadership mechanisms) influence employee relationships (and vice versa) and help to build the emerging, self-organizing characteristics of the organization through the complex adaptive systems. Through these interactions and self-actualizing events, the organizational outcomes are directly influenced and changed. This leads to impacting the employees, which impacts their relationships with each other and leadership events. The arrows on the border of Leadership Mechanisms indicate that each of the mechanisms interact and influence each other—independently and collectively. Inspired by (J. K. Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2015).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As proposed in Figure 1, a Christian higher educational institution operates through interactions between various employees. Each employee at some point utilizes the various leadership mechanisms. However, to the extent they can make institutional changes will depend on their functional responsibility, which has typically been the defining factor for decision-making in higher education. Through CLT, a framework can be utilized to determine what type of leadership mechanisms are used the most. If there is an over-dependence on a particular leadership mechanism, there would be the opportunity to move towards a more balanced interaction between employees.

Additional research is needed to further the understanding of CLT within a context as specific as Christian higher education. There are many areas that can be studied, however a precursory understanding of the following four questions would help to push CLT further towards an operational asset for these schools to assess their organizational culture and behavior.

1. Which leadership mechanism has the most significant impact on complex adaptive systems?
2. How do the different leadership mechanisms interact with/influence each other?
3. CLT in and of itself does not directly engage in theoretical constructs that focus on power relations, politics and responsibility (Fenwick, 2010). Can CLT be utilized to understand the 'middle space' between leader and follower?
4. Can CLT be utilized to assess employee performance and growth potential to assist in the leadership needs of the school in the future?

There are, of course, many other areas that need to be researched to find the boundaries and weaknesses of CLT within this context. As CLT matures as a theory, there will be additional validation measures needed to be taken to confirm the initial constructs employed by CLT.

CONCLUSION

CLT moves away from the linear explanations used in many other leadership theories towards an understanding where uncertainty and unpredictability are the norm (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Due to the complexity of measuring CLT in an organization, the methods to collect data remain not yet fully developed. Utilizing CLT in an environment such as Christian higher education will allow the dynamic environment to truly understand how to operate most effectively with limited resources. Using the conceptual model proposed can help develop framework for how future research can be carried out. In the end, within Christian higher educational institutions, mission and vision will always create a dynamic and living ideation for how they carry out their purpose. Therefore, complexity will always be present due to the constant tension of innovation and tradition in order to thrive in the 21st century and beyond.

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