

ABSTRACT

A PORTRAIT OF LEADERSHIP: REVEREND THEODORE M. HESBURGH, C.S.C.

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Leadership has been described as an art (DePree, 1989; Manske, 1999). Like art, the study of leadership is complex. The current demand in education focuses on effective leadership within institutions (Northhouse, 2004). Effective leaders are essential to the future success of societal institutions; and studying the complexities of leadership will become progressively more important as global pressures increase in the 21st Century.

As we face another period of transformation in higher education, the leadership portrait created in this research provides a useful example of how leaders may deal with current transitions. In particular, almost half of current university presidents are over 61 years of age (Burns Phillips, 2007), highlighting two key points. First, institutions of higher education will soon be losing critical elements of their institutional memories as these sitting leaders retire. Second, new leaders coming into these central positions of power need to be prepared to lead increasingly complex organizations. Better understanding of the experiences of past leaders can provide a means for these incoming leaders to learn their roles more quickly.

The portrait created by examining the leadership of Father Theodore Hesburgh, the former President of the University of Notre Dame identified by his contemporaries

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and by historians as an effective leader, provides a tool for current and future educational leaders. Utilizing a post-positivist paradigm, this qualitative study analyzed three specific

writings by and about Hesburgh, using three different leadership instruments for analysis.

Interpretative qualitative methods allowed for the creation of a coding schema for analysis of selected writings by and about Fr. Hesburgh. Generalizations, descriptions, patterns, and themes were used to construct a portrait that illustrated the complexities of leadership, then described Hesburgh's predominant leadership style and characteristics (Hatch, 2002). A retrospective analysis was completed. Data were re-examined and reflected upon in a historical, social, and political context for new meanings.

This research uncovered several key findings. First, the portrait of Hesburgh illustrates that his leadership was multi-faceted and he operated from a variety of frames depending on the requirements of the situation. Second, positional leaders play a critical role in framing institutional vision and understanding by campus members. Third, the context and climate of higher education influences how effective leaders are defined as well as what characteristics are valued. Finally, reflection by sitting leaders allows for double-loop learning opportunities and professional growth.

Two main conclusions were drawn from the research. First, multiple lenses of analysis provided a more complete appreciation of the critical elements of effective leadership; in this portrait underscoring the need for using multiple perspectives in leading. Second, leaders need to use reflection to allow for continuous learning as the evolving context of higher education demands different forms of leadership.