



HANOVER  
RESEARCH

# INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURING FOR STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION

June 2020

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



## Executive Summary

<i>Project Objective</i> .....	<u>3</u>
<i>Methodology</i> .....	<u>4</u>
<i>Recommendations</i> .....	<u>5</u>
<i>Key Findings</i> .....	<u>7</u>
Section I: Leadership Structure .....	<u>9</u>
Section II: Leadership Culture .....	<u>14</u>
Section III: Strategy and Organizational Structures .....	<u>19</u>
Section IV: Organizational Agility and COVID-19 .....	<u>24</u>

# PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The institution would like to understand how other institutions' leadership has created organizational structures that allow them to successfully implement the institutions' strategic priorities and/or demonstrate strong leadership structures while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The institution seeks to understand how other institutions remain agile and able to plan for and respond to change.



- ✓ **Understand** the roles and responsibilities of peer institutions' key leadership teams.



- ✓ **Identify** the structures and/or roles institutions have in place to respond to change with agility and remain competitive and cutting edge.



- ✓ **Explore** how institutions' structure leadership teams to effectively execute big picture strategic priorities.

# METHODOLOGY



Hanover Research conducted **six (6) in-depth interviews** with college presidents (5) and a senior administrator (1) from four private and one public U.S. universities.

## Note:

Qualitative research is exploratory and designed to add insight and a depth of understanding to a particular question or topic. Qualitative findings outline commonalities and trends but are not intended to be statistically significant or to provide generalizable conclusions.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN EXECUTIVE TEAM



1

**Adjust executive team roles and responsibilities to reflect strategic priorities in the newly created strategic plan.** Shape the executive team around strategic priorities; do not shape strategic priorities around the strengths of the executive team. This might result in a change in membership of the executive team.

2

**Keep executive team roles flexible but maintain clarity around each member's remit for specific initiatives.** A balance of explicit assignment of responsibilities and role flexibility allows the president to delegate priorities based on cabinet members' strengths but without ambiguity about who is responsible for what.

3

**Rotate meeting chairs and encourage the executive team to meet occasionally without the president in attendance.** When there is shared facilitation during meetings, members are more likely to prepare for and engage in agenda items. Further, a rotating chairperson role encourages both leadership development and candid discussion.

# OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS



1

**Use buy-in on the strategic plan generated from the campus listening tour conducted at the beginning of the new president's tenure.** A campus listening tour is not only an opportunity to learn about the community to inform the strategic plan but a way to develop relationships across the campus. Facilitate support from these established connections as the executive team implements strategic initiatives.

2

**Institute a non-governance group so the executive team can receive campus-wide advisement on elements of the strategic plan without being bound by a decision-making body.** This volunteer committee allows for wider community feedback in planning and may highlight obstacles to strategic plan implementation not considered in official governance meetings.

3

**Develop a "committee on the future" to consider what the institution will look like 10-20 years from now.** Governance bodies usually do not have the bandwidth to consider that type of time horizon, and this is a way of involving younger faculty and staff in planning the college's future.

# KEY FINDINGS



- **There is a fairly common core structure to executive leadership teams.** This includes the Chief Academic Officer and Vice Presidents for Finance, Enrolment, Development, and Marketing/Communications. In addition to this common structure, other executive team members may include Vice Presidents for Student Affairs, Human Resources, or Information Technology; Dean of Faculty; and Presidents of colleges at multi-campus institutions. Each of these groups has the remits one would expect for their positions, though reporting structures vary by institution.
- **Some institutions have “secondary leadership councils” or “senior leadership councils,” which tend to include leaders of divisions and departments not included in the president’s cabinet.** These bodies tend to be more forward-thinking, considering the college needs on a three-to-five-year time scale, whereas the president’s cabinet is more concerned with implementation of the current strategic plan.

# KEY FINDINGS (CONT'D)



- **Leadership structures generally reflect the strategic priorities of the institution rather than vice versa.** Certain positions are elevated to or demoted from the president's cabinet depending on institutional strategy.
- **Participants emphasize the importance of positive management and community culture over and above effective institutional and leadership team structure.** As a whole, there is a sense that the effectiveness of institutional structures stems less from their organization than from the quality of both the people and the communication operating within those structures. In particular:
  - Members of the leadership team need to feel like their voice is heard and feel comfortable expressing their views;
  - Faculty need to feel like they understand the purpose of campus initiatives and that their input is respected.



# LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

# CORE MEMBERS OF PRESIDENT'S CABINET

Nearly every participant mentioned the following as members of the core executive leadership team:

Title	Oversees	
<b>Chief Academic Officer</b>	- All academic programs - Registrar - Graduation and retention	- Institutional research - Library - Career development
<b>Chief Financial Officer</b>	- All business and finance - Information technology - Human resources	- Buildings & grounds - Contracted services - Campus safety
<b>Chief Enrolment Officer</b>	- Undergraduate recruitment and financial aid	- Marketing and social advertising partnerships
<b>Chief Advancement Officer</b>	-Alumni relations	- Fundraising (including all events)
<b>Chief Student Affairs Officer</b>	- Athletics - Student engagement (on-campus and online)	- Medical care - Food service
<b>Chief Communications Officer</b>	- All marketing and communications	

## Positions that are less frequent members of the president's cabinet:

- Chief Human Resources Officer
- Chief Technology Officer
- Vice President Strategic Initiatives
- Vice President Diversity and Inclusion
- President of College (at multi-campus institution)
- Director of Athletics
- General Counsel

# MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDENT'S CABINET HAVE DIFFERENT STRATEGIC ROLES

In addition to the traditional responsibilities that come with roles on the executive team, specific members may have particular strategic charges.



## Chief Academic Officer

Persuading the faculty to adopt the college's proposed curricula and managing the adoption of online instruction during COVID



## Vice President for Strategic Initiatives

Thinking *only* of new initiatives without having to manage ongoing projects



## Chief Financial Officer

Because this role is responsible for financial planning, it may be appropriate for the CFO to chair committees that involve long-term planning

*"So when I [created the vice president for] strategic initiatives, it was really because I needed someone who was actually going to look to both the political balance and to wake up every morning and only think about initiatives, not with a portfolio that they have to keep going."*

*-Anonymous*

# SECONDARY LEADERSHIP TEAM FOR MEDIUM-TERM PLANNING



Some institutions have a secondary cabinet, consisting of division chairs and administrative directors who represent more specific institutional stakeholders. In general, the purpose of the group is to enable discussions of institutional strategy and needs across a wider base of constituents.

A pitfall of this group is that it can either serve as a rubber stamp for the executive cabinet, or, conversely, undermine the authority of the executive cabinet. A solution for this problem is for the secondary cabinet to have a specific charge from the executive cabinet, such as being responsible for medium-term planning rather than engaging directly with implementation of the current strategic plan.

*“If [the secondary cabinet] is only symbolic, they pick up on that really quickly [...], [or] the [executive] cabinet's not really empowered to make any decisions, that it all goes back to [the secondary cabinet] which the executive cabinet then rubber stamps. [The way I've] solved this problem is [for the secondary cabinet] to fall into this gap between tactical operational decision-making and longer-term strategic planning. [...] Where do we need to go as a college in the medium run? We know from the strategic plan what we need to do immediately, tactically, and we've got a longer-term vision for the college.”*

*-Anonymous*

# A 'COMMITTEE ON THE FUTURE'

*"We call it the 'futures group' here. And it really is a blue sky group. And it's mostly faculty and it's much less formal and we meet at my house a couple of times a semester. And my previous provost had the pretty brilliant idea of structuring it around what would you want the college to look like when students, when kids that are born today want to come to the college? So that's 17 or 18 years from now. And it's a way of engaging younger faculty that are actually going to be here."*

*-Anonymous*



Because of the immediate needs presented by addressing the strategic plan, along with thinking about elements of the college's next strategic plan, there is often little time to consider what the institution will look like in the distant future.

One way of addressing this is to establish an informal committee that considers long-term trends in higher education and how the institution can stay ahead of the curve. This may be an especially good way to involve younger faculty without burdening them with substantial time commitments.



# LEADERSHIP CULTURE

# ESTABLISHING A TEAM

The early stages of a president's tenure are critical for assessing the need for changes to the executive leadership team, either in the form of elevating or demoting certain positions from the team or changing who occupies those positions.

While it is critical that the president be able to hire people with whom he or she can form positive working relationships, especially for positions like chief academic officer, vice president of strategy, and chief financial officer, personnel changes should be made judiciously, perhaps making personnel changes slowly over time.

However, if a president does not believe he or she can work effectively with a member of the team, it may be best to find a replacement immediately.

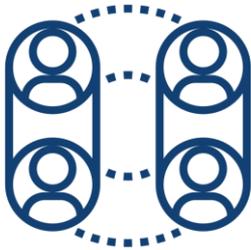
*"The problem of a new president is you've got who's there. And they're probably really good people and if you replace them all, all at once, you look like an axe murderer. So you build a team over time." - Anonymous*



*"Don't be afraid to form and form, [and] sometimes quickly, the right team to do the job. Sometimes it's the right team at a particular point in time [...], but they may not be the right person at a different point in time." -Anonymous*

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The early stages are also a critical time for a president to learn about the campus culture and establish a vision for the future. Part of this process can involve the president conducting a campus “listening tour,” where he or she can learn about stakeholder needs. In addition to helping with planning, this is also an opportunity to start building relationships across the campus. These relationships will facilitate communication and decision-making when community members have concerns and/or when buy-in is needed for strategic initiatives.



*“You've got to build that relationship beyond the [leadership] team. You've got to build the relationship with the campus because if it looks like all you're working [only] on your [own] team, you're going to come off as autocratic.”*

*-Anonymous*

*“Every meeting, it's [an opportunity to present] [...] what our goal and our vision is for this institution so that it becomes part of the conversation, and people start to buy it.”*

*-Anonymous*

# CULTIVATING A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

A positive and collaborative executive team culture facilitates both idea development and decision-making. To foster this culture:

- President-less Meetings** ▶ Members of the team meet without the president both to develop leadership across the team and to facilitate discussions that may be difficult to have candidly with the president's presence.
- Meeting Rotation** ▶ Rather than the president leading the discussion, another member of the executive team volunteers or is assigned to do so.
- Administrative Suite** ▶ If executive team offices are physically grouped together, this can facilitate better communication and allow the president to meet with individual members in their own offices rather than summoning team members to the president's office.
- Freedom to Fail** ▶ The team needs to be willing to propose and try innovative ideas that do not have a guarantee of success.
- Working with Strengths** ▶ Recognize team members' strengths and weaknesses, taking advantage of the former and accepting the latter.
- Respecting Expertise** ▶ While having team input on all issues is important, the team should ultimately defer to the expertise of particular members where appropriate.
- Avoiding Cliques** ▶ There may be a tendency for the chief academic officer, chief financial officer, and VP for strategy to form a stronger relationship with the president than other team members, by the nature of their more strategy-oriented roles.

# COMMUNICATING ON A REGULAR BASIS

As faculty and the board of directors share governance roles, constant communication with these groups is critical. A president can facilitate this by:

- Apprising the faculty senate president and board chair of institutional initiatives
- Mixing administrative and faculty personnel on advisory counsels, working groups, and task forces.

Clear communication improves strategic execution not only by softening resistance to new initiatives but also by raising the potential for the faculty's and board's generating innovative solutions as problems arise.

*"I also involve the faculty senate president a lot [...] and he can play I think a good key communication role with the faculty [...] I speak to the chair of our board of trustees [on an almost daily basis] [...] He provides excellent advice, and [...] you never want your boss to be surprised about anything." - Anonymous*



*"Have advisory groups made up of folks from across campus that are providing innovation and creative solutions and [...] to implement and make sure that people [...] understand what we're trying to accomplish. Even if it [doesn't involve] everybody on campus, they need to be aware of it." - Anonymous*



# STRATEGY AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

# EVALUATE THE STRATEGIC PLAN



**Attaching key performance indicators (KPIs) to strategic plans enables the executive team to evaluate its progress on strategic priorities.** The president can then use these KPIs to evaluate individual executive team member performance in his or her respective area.

However, because institutions are not always able to attend to all elements of a strategic plan (e.g., insufficient funding availability for an initiative), leadership should delay developing metrics until it is certain they will pursue a particular priority.

*“Well, when we crafted the strategic plan, we attached metrics or KPIs to every action step [...] If something is called for in the plan, but it's a later priority, we don't attach metrics till we get closer [in case it is not pursued] [...] And then once those metrics are established we grade ourselves on those and report that out to the entire campus community [...] In their annual performance reviews, the vice presidents have to tie [their goals] back to the strategic plan.”*  
-Anonymous

# CONSIDER A NON-GOVERNANCE GROUP



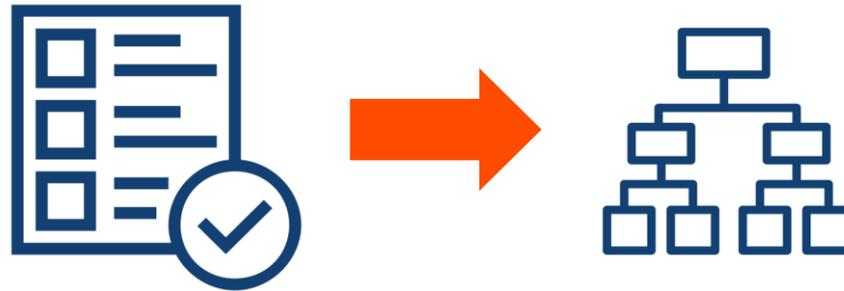
One of the disadvantages of the strategic planning process is that there is often not enough time during official governance meetings with faculty or the board to adequately think through all aspects of the plan.

A solution to this problem is to establish a non-governance group that meets during the planning process. This group can provide feedback on the strategic plan but is not constrained by having to reach binding decisions on particular matters.

*“And what I needed was a non-governance group that could advise me on strategic planning [...] We have people from every college on it, but they're not representatives and I try to represent all of our working groups. [These] meetings are open to the entire campus. And so this group really works by consensus and so they'll review what we're doing on the strategic plan. [The chair] is always a faculty member [who] works broadly across the campus and that group sort of sets its agenda with input from me. And then they do a day long retreat, typically in June. [...] it's a great way to get input, to get feedback without having my hands tied by it.”*  
-Anonymous

# MAKE LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Changes in leadership should follow changes in the college's strategic priorities, rather than the other way around. Such changes could include shifting cabinet member workloads to facilitate program integrations, as well as elevating or demoting certain positions to or from the cabinet.



*"I added a major program to the portfolio of the vice president for academic affairs, which was our career development area. And I wanted it fully integrated with the academic model and faculty advising and so on." -Anonymous*

*"I really felt the need to acknowledge the importance of athletics by making it a cabinet-level position [...] I've worked at an institution where we had a great VP for IT, But the result was that rather than IT being a tool that the rest of us could use, IT was frequently driving the bus." -Anonymous*

# BE CAUTIOUS WITH ADDITIONAL GROUPS

Participants named a number of working groups, task forces, and advisory committees that facilitate strategy and planning:

- Planning for the Future Committee
- Board of Trustees Finance Working Group
- Strategic Initiatives Advisory Group
- “Blue Sky” Committee
- Campus Planning Committee
- Enrolment Policy Committee
- Economic Policy Committee
- COVID-19 Working Group

*“It's easy to set up groups, but they turn around and look at everybody and say, ‘So why are we here? What are we supposed to do?’ And it requires a tremendous amount of staff time to care and feed these groups. So I'd be extraordinarily cautious about setting up a lot of additional groups in the beginning when you really don't know what is [already] there.”*

*-Anonymous*

Participants mentioned the need to be careful about assembling and disassembling these groups. There is a temptation to create groups whenever problems arise. However, if the groups are too large or the purpose of the group is not precisely clear, they can be a waste of resources. It is better not to form a working group than it is to create one that is under-resourced either in terms of time or attention to its mission. These groups should therefore scaffold quickly, fulfill their purpose, and then be disbanded.



# ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY AND COVID-19

# ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY

Institutions that are efficient and able to respond to change share a number of characteristics:



## Clear Roles

When members of the executive and secondary leadership teams are clear about who is doing what, individuals can work together more efficiently and escape confusion.

*“If everyone understands what their responsibilities are [...], that's the key.”  
-Anonymous*



## Forward Thinking

Discussions need to be not only about executing initiatives and managing current portfolios but also about anticipating what the institution will need in the future .

*“The way you stay agile is with your own leadership. [...] My job isn't what we're doing now, [it's] where we're going to be.”  
-Anonymous*



## Small Groups

Rather than having large groups involved in decision-making processes, keep groups small and emphasize communication with broader audiences to receive feedback.

*“Having a smaller group work on it [...] and keeping lines of communication open with larger groups, [is] very effective.” - Anonymous*

# COVID-19 WORKING GROUPS

Daily meetings for COVID-19 working groups are essential for responding to changing institutional needs. These working groups typically consist of the director of facilities, dean of students, director of development and alumni relations, chief information officer, and any remaining members of the senior executive leadership team. In general, despite the limited information available, institutions follow state and federal public health guidelines when making their decisions.



## President



Present to board realistic best and worst case financial scenarios.



## Chief Academic Officer



Plan for moving academic and student life programs online.



## VP Enrolment Management



Coordinate production of recorded student orientation materials, viewable online.

*"There's a COVID-19 working group which [is] everyone on the cabinet [as well as] the vice president for enrolment management, the CIO, and the dean of students [...] and the director of facilities." -Anonymous*

*We had our [...] worst case and best case scenarios and shared that with the board. So the board felt like, "Okay. The hole could be deep, but we could still handle it." -Anonymous*



Thank you.