

SURVIVING and
THRIVING
in **ACADEMIA**

THRIVING IN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP



EDITED BY

SHARMILA PIXY FERRIS • KATHLEEN WALDRON

THRIVING IN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

One of the clues to successful leadership is the ability to sustain a narrative about an institution's or an organization's heritage and direction. Colleges and universities are, or should be, mission-based, student-centered, and market-sensitive, three features that lend themselves to storytelling. By relating the vision of founders and the successes of following generations, leaders can use story telling to make complex ideas comprehensible and inspire new generations. To be believable, the storyteller must demonstrate commitment to the institution and sincere reflection on its foundational principles, as well as the context for decisions and choices, while also sharing their lived experiences. The stories of and by these ten varied reflective leaders help define leadership in practice in multiple university settings and culture around the world. It is an excellent guide for those who occupy, or seek to occupy, the helm of an academic institution.

Dr Robert A. Scott, President *Emeritus*, Adelphi University and Ramapo College of New Jersey;
Author, *How University Boards Work*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018; Eric Hoffer Book Prize Awardee, 2019; Senior Advisor to Grant Thornton Higher Education and Non-Profit Practice

Surviving and Thriving in Academia provides short, accessible books for navigating the many challenges, responsibilities and opportunities of academic careers. The series is particularly dedicated to supporting the professional journeys of early and mid-career academics and doctoral students, but will present books of use to scholars at all stages in their careers. Books within the series draw on real-life examples from international scholars, offering practical advice and a supportive and encouraging tone throughout.

Series Editor: Marian Mahat, The University of Melbourne, Australia

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION

Sharmila Pixy Ferris and Kathleen Waldron

LEADERSHIP AND STORYTELLING

Leadership is a complex concept, as is reflected in the variety, diversity, and extent of scholarly and popular definitions of leadership. A search of Goodreads' "leadership" shelf found 34,501 books on leadership, while a much-cited meta-analysis of leadership literature by [Kellerman \(2012\)](#) found over 1,500 definitions and 40 models of leadership. Several other meta-analyses over the decades (from [Eagly & Johnson, 1990](#) to [Jackson, Meyer, & Wang, 2013](#) and [Mackey, Parker Ellen, McAllister, & Alexander, 2021](#)) support [Zheng, Meister, and Barker Caza's \(2021\)](#) statement that there "is no universal meaning associated with the role of leader" (p. 1179). So what, then, can we say leadership is? From a theoretical framework, classical theories of leadership include personality and physical traits, leadership as behavior, leadership as charisma, and leadership as relationally focused. Other scholars like [Guthrie and Jenkins \(2018\)](#) discuss theoretical models of leadership that span ideas rooted in "Great Men" leading, leadership as service and leadership as social change.

Clearly, leadership means different things to different people. In this book, we explore a variety of understandings of leadership through the stories of 10 experienced global leaders. In taking this approach, we follow an established scholarly tradition, as stories have been recognized by scholars as an effective way to define leadership in practice (Perez Amado, 2019; Smith, 2012; Zheng et al., 2021) and a storytelling approach to leadership is helpful as a way of communicating effectively with people (Bates & Gilbert, 2008). In this book, we take a narrative and ethnographic focus to the leadership literature by focusing on the stories of 10 effective leaders from English-language academic institutions around the world. Leaders from universities in Australia, Canada, England, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, and the United States, plus one “world citizen,” offer informative and inspiring stories. We believe personal stories can speak to a broad population of academics, appealing to those who aspire to academic leadership, as well as those who are currently in academic or other leadership positions and looking to thrive in academic leadership.

We focus on leaders’ stories as narratives that occupy a distinctive and universal place in human society, going back to the ancient Greeks. Stories are important today, particularly in organizational contexts, as Fisher (1985, 1999) notes; humans understand complex information through narrative. This book builds on the understanding that storytelling promotes meaningful communication, with stories able to provide more information, stronger persuasion, and better guidance than prescriptive texts. Stories in which leaders share their own experiences present nuanced elements of leadership that cannot necessarily be revealed through traditional research methods. Stories encompass retrospective contemplation of situations and events and capture individual human and contextual elements that influence decision-making and

leadership approaches. Academic storytelling, although growing, remains under-utilized in contemporary academe but provides a richer, more meaningful understanding of being a leader in academe than is generated from the nexus of epistemic, existential, philosophical, and practical concerns (Ferris & Waldron, 2021).

Aligned with storytelling is lived experience research, which allows for understanding human experiences, choices, and options (Given, 2008). In spite of the richness of narrative and lived experience research, it is still rare to see higher education leadership texts that take a storytelling, lived experience approach. Leadership stories abound in the business world, often focusing on the stories of successful business leaders (Smith, 2012; Zheng et al., 2021), but leadership stories in higher education lag far behind business and industry. We believe stories should be utilized more in the academy as learning from stories allows for the development of one's own leadership strategies and style. Inspiring leadership stories come from many perspectives, and the stories that captivate us speak to us deeply.

In taking a storytelling, lived-experience approach where leaders tell their own stories, our book, as our previous book, fosters a deeper and broader understanding of issues in higher education, with relevant contextual considerations suggested by expert leaders. Personal leadership stories can help inspire future leaders and guide current leaders in leveling up their skills. Academics who would not normally be able to converse in person with a wide variety of academic leaders can, in a sense, "converse" through stories, walking alongside the storyteller and learning what works and doesn't work in building and developing effective leadership.

OUR GOAL FOR THIS BOOK

As we've already noted, we believe that what makes this book unique is the focus on leadership stories and lived experiences. Although many popular and even top selling business books focus on leadership stories (e.g., [George & Sims, 2007](#); [Sinek, 2011](#); [Smith, 2012](#)), texts on narrative ethnography on leadership are much rarer in academe. This book remedies the lack, using an ethnographic focus to share 10 leaders' stories which demonstrate effective *interactional* leadership and provide guidance on how current and aspiring leaders can survive and thrive in the academy, effectively achieving leadership goals.

Mid-career academic leaders interested in advancing up the leadership ladder and those interested in entering higher education leadership can find this book useful to survive and thrive in a changing educational landscape. Today, in addition to the ever-growing demands on higher education institutions, the Coronavirus pandemic has complicated academic life in unprecedented ways. Complex and dynamic outside forces from the pandemic to dynamic and interacting sociocultural, political, economic, and technological factors impact leadership in higher education. In this fluid and shifting landscape, our book provides a resource of value. Relatedly, the international focus of our book offers a unique perspective on thriving in global higher education.

Our book also meets a need for an accessible leadership text relevant across cultures. While higher education institutions are shaped by the culture and nation in which they are located, stories have a universal place in human society. As [Ferris and Waldron \(2021\)](#) note, a lived experience approach is phenomenological and interpretive, allowing for a nuanced consideration of leadership that cannot necessarily be revealed through traditional research methods. Our book, therefore, meets a real need by fostering a deeper understanding of

leadership through the stories of successful leaders in an international context.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book develops our previous book, *Higher Education Leadership: Pathways and Insights*, published with Emerald in 2021. The book built on interviews of 20 presidents, chancellors, vice presidents, provosts, and deans from a variety of colleges and universities in the United States. When we concluded those interviews in 2020, we could not then know that our worlds were about to change due to COVID-19 and the sudden shutdown of most on-campus activities across the country, so the narrative experiences in that book did not describe leadership under that particular complexity. While the book provided significant examples of leadership during other critical experiences, as well as advice for future academic leaders, it was focused on experiences of higher education leaders in the United States only. After we completed this book, we thought further on an issue that many of the American leaders had touched on – the globalization of higher education. We had our own interests as we have both had international experiences in our own academic careers, Professor Ferris in India and Canada and Professor Waldron in Venezuela.

We decided that considering higher education leadership from an international perspective was worth pursuing, and Emerald’s “Surviving and Thriving in Academia” series provided an appropriate venue. Encouraged by our publishers, we focused on inviting academic leaders from traditionally English-language nations to contribute a chapter in their voice about their path to leadership. Using a set of questions we

provided as a rough guideline, each author wrote about their path to their present position and reflected on what made an academic leader successful – or not.

Our contributors were very generous with their time and thoughtfulness. All of them had an international position or project early in their careers, which motivated them and provided a broader and deeper understanding of people, group dynamics, and cultural differences. Many of our contributors studied abroad for their advanced degrees. Three of our contributors were Fulbright scholars in England, Venezuela, and the United States. One was a Commonwealth Fellow in Boston for a year, and another joined a group of scholars to explore academic libraries in the United States. Several held senior positions in more than one country during their careers.

Seven contributors had traditional academic careers, rising through the ranks from assistant to full professor and then into administrative positions. But three had nonacademic careers – accounting, law, and educational consulting – before entering the academy. Eight of the 10 contributors served as presidents or chancellors of institutions, four of whom actually presided over more than one institution. Seven contributors have lived and worked in countries other than their nation of birth, while all have participated in international fora, conferences, and research projects. They have combined experience over decades, serving as deans, provosts, presidents, and chancellors at large, complex institutions serving thousands of students. Some have served for years and recently retired, giving them a historical perspective on higher education. Others are newer to leadership roles with a focus on current challenges facing global higher education. All are devoted to students, faculty, and their institutions, understanding that their leadership serves others, not themselves.

Here we offer the stories of these 10 leaders in their own voices, reflecting on their lived experiences. In order to provide a context for each contributor, we have provided a summary of the educational structure in each country included in this work – Australia, Canada, England (UK), India, Ireland (UK), New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, and the United States of America. We also include a global leader who has led in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia.

STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

This book provides leadership stories from 10 leaders who lead or have led institutions of higher education: Andrew Deeks, Vice Chancellor, Murdoch University, Australia; Ross Paul, currently at the University of British Columbia and President Emeritus of the University of Windsor in Canada; Swapna Banerjee, Dean of the Faculty of Education, Journalism and Library and Information Sciences at the University of Calcutta in India; Ciarán Ó hÓgartaigh, President of University of Galway, Ireland; Robin Gauld, former Dean and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Commerce) at University of Otago, New Zealand; Arnaud De Meyer, President Emeritus of Singapore Management University, Singapore; R. Mamokgethi Phakeng, former Vice-Chancellor of University of Cape Town, South Africa; Helen Mountfield, Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford University, England; John V. Lombardi, Professor Emeritus and former Chancellor, University of Massachusetts; and Marcia Grant, retired president of Effat University (Saudi Arabia) and leader at many other international institutions.

Below we introduce you to each of these successful leaders, but before we do so, we should note that before each leader's story, we provide a short overview of the educational system

within the country, from the school system as feeder institutions that prepare students for entry into higher education, to the logistics of acceptance into university. [Here, we note that in the US institutions of higher education granting bachelor and postgraduate degrees are called colleges or universities. In Canada, universities typically grant bachelor and post-graduate degrees while “college” generally refers to technical institutions, community colleges and so on. In countries with a more British-inspired educational system, which often require national school leaving certificate exams as an entry to degree-granting institutions of higher education, the term university is used for such institutions and the term “college” can include the last year or two of high school, also known as “junior” college.]. Our description of educational systems in each country also covers the number of institutions of higher education and the number of these institutions globally ranked among the best in the world. We also briefly discuss the faculty structure within higher education, administrative structure, and university governance.

While administrative structure and governance vary widely depending on the political system in the country, faculty structure has many commonalities across global higher education systems. Typically faculty progress from entry-level to full professor, and often academic leaders arise from academic faculty (Mahat & Tatebe, 2019). There are some differences in the faculty path from entry-level to full professor. In the United States and Canada, faculty enter at the level of assistant professor and there are three rungs on the ladder to promotion: assistant, associate, and full professor. The assistant professor position is probationary, and many assistant professors do not receive tenure and must leave the institution; if they receive tenure they are generally promoted to associate professor. Most faculty who choose to enter administration/leadership do so after achieving the rank of full professor, and